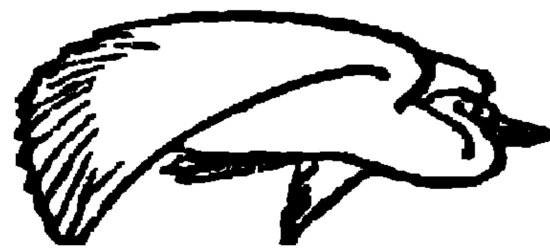
SARASVATĪ

A STUDY ON HER CONCEPT AND ICONOGRAPHY

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CONTENTS

Abbreviations

AP.	*Aparājitapṛccha.*
Ait. Br.	*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.*
ASIAR.	*Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India.*
AV.	*Atharvaveda.*
IHQ.	*Indian Historical Quarterly.*
JAHRS.	*Journal of the Archaeological and Historical Research Society.*
JIH.	*Journal of Indian History.*
JRAS.	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.*
JUB.	*Journal of the University of Bombay.*
JUPHS.	*Journal of the Uttar Pradesh Historical Society.*
JVRS.	*Journal of Varendra Research Society.*
RV.	*Ṛgveda.*
Sat. Br.	*Satapatha Brāhmaṇa.*
SR.	*Śilparatna.*
VD.	*Visnudharmottara-Purāna.*

I
INTRODUCTION

Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, is held in high esteem in India. She is known variously as Vāc, Vāgdevī, Vāgīśvarī, Vānī, Sāradā, Bhāratī, Vīṇāpāṇi and so on. Her milk-white clay images are worshipped in Bengal with great pomp and grandeur by the seekers of knowledge, music and art on the *Śrī-pañcamī* day falling usually in the bright fortnight in the month of *Māgha* (January-February) every year. In India learning being valued as one of the principal objectives of life, the goddess Sarasvatī, as knowledge incarnate, is widely worshipped from the very ancient times. In the Brahmanical mythology, she is conceived as the wife either of Brahmā or Viṣṇu or Śiva, the members of the Brahmanical triad, while the Buddhists assimilated her into their pantheon as the wife of Mañjuśrī, the Buddhist God of Transcendental Wisdom. Several *sādhanas* in the *Sādhanamālā* allude to her various aspects and prescribe that she confers learning, intelligence and memory to the worshippers. In Jaina pantheon she is named as Sarasvatī, Śrutadevatā, Vāṇī and Sāradā, and is assigned an extremly honoured place. Thus in the domain of Indian religious and cultural life, irrespective of creeds, she maintains a formidable position throughout the ages.

I. *Some preliminary observations on Sarasvatī*:

In her earliest references, as found in the *Ṛgveda*; Sarasvatī is the name of a river girdling Brahmāvarta, the sound land, on which the Vedic culture flourished. Gradually she becomes a river-goddess, identifies with Vāc in the post-vedic literature, and finally emerges as the pre-eminent goddess of learning and wisdom. This peculiar development of the conception from a river to a river-goddess and then to an abstract goddess of wisdom is possibily due to her association with the prayer and sacrificial performances of *yajña* on the banks of the Sarasvatī. But her character as a river-goddess is never completely separated from her abstract intellectual nature. These two characters run side by side and are finally converge into the abstract concept of Vāc, the goddess of speech, stimulating the holy thoughts. It is also interesting to note that the epithet *ambitame*, or the most motherly, applied to Sarasvatī in the *Ṛgveda*, brings her in close connection with other mother goddesses like Aditi, Pṛthivī, Purandhi, etc. This is probably due to her capacity of supplying abundant water and thereby ensuing fertility to the lands on her borders for the growth of crops. But throughout the ages she is never lost in the Hindu mythology and religion of her original identity as the goddess of learning or wisdom, though she is sometimes assigned a unique position as the embodiment of śakti or energic principle.

In Hindu iconography Sarasvatī is found to be represented in several forms with wide variety in emblems, vehicles and attributes. She is two-armed, four-armed or multi-armed, and found both in standing and seated poses. Her snow-white complexion, garments and ornaments emphasise purity on her. The texts, however, are not unanimous as to her attributes, which include manuscript (*pustaka*), white lotus (*puṇḍarika*), rosary (*akṣamālā*), lute (*vīṇā*), water-vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*), etc. Usually, her vehicle is swan, but images of Sarasvatī seated on ram, peacock and lion have also been discovered from different places in India.

The Jaina Sarasvatī or Śrutadevatā approximates very closely to the Brahmanical Sarasvatī. She is generally endowed with two or four arms, holding lotus, book, rosary, water-vessel and showing the *varadamudrā*. The *Śvetāmbaras* generally give her swan as the vehicle while the *Digambaras* a peacock, both the birds agreeing with the conception of Sarasvatī as a river-goddess of the Hindus. The *Śvetāmbaras* hold special festivals in her honour on the *Jñānapañcamī*, which is the fifth day of the bright fortnight in the month of *Kārttika*, and the *Digambaras* observe the *Śrutapañcamī* on the fifth day of the bright half of *Jyeṣṭha*.

The Buddhist Sarasvatī shows four different forms, viz. Vājra-sarasvatī, Vajra-vīṇāsarsvatī, Vajra-sāradā and Mahāsarasvatī. Like Mañjuśrī and Prajñāpāramitā, she is also believed to be a bestower of knowledge, wisdom and memory. Besides,

there are other forms of the deity which were popularly worshipped by the Buddhists. The cult of the goddess became so universally accepted by the Buddhists during its Tantrayāna phase that her worship was not confined only in India, but spread out into Nepal and Tibet, Japan and Java. In all these countries she is regarded as the goddess of speech and eloquence holding lute (*vīnā*) in her hands. She is white-complexioned and shown seated or standing, her vehicle being swan or peacock.

It may be noted in this connection that from the very ancient times, the Indian poets, sages and common people, in view of fulfilling the intellectual attainments, composed verses and scriptures on Sarasvatī. There is also a common belief that the great poets like Vālmīki and Kālidasa obtained the power of composing verses from her. In subsequent times also the poets normally begin their verses with an invocation to Sarasvatī. A Hindu child even to-day worships her on the first day of starting his educational life. An Indian believes that by the grace of Sarasvatī a fool becomes a sage of eminence or a man of learning (*Yat prasādāt muṇi-śreṣṭḥa mūrkho bhavati paṇḍitaḥ*).

II. *Modern Researches on Sarasvatī* :

Sarasvatī, one of the most important early Indian deities, had attracted attention of many of the modern scholars who made researches about her antiquity, concept and iconic characteristics. It is

rather imperative for us to take into account and discuss the importance of these researches, many of which came to our help in shaping the present treatise as a comprehensive study on the conceptual and iconic developments of the goddess.

Thomas Moore in his memorable work, entitled *Hindu Pantheon,* published as early as 1810, made an endeavour to appraise the power and position of a number of Brahmanical gods and goddesses including Sarasvatī on the basis of different Puranic myths and legends connected with their worship, According to him, the goddesses are uniformly represented by the Hindus as the subordinate powers of their respective lords. Sarasvatī as the wife of Brahmā enjoys the creative faculty of imagination and invention and is worshipped as the presiding deity of literature, fine arts, music and rhetoric. Her attributes correspond with those of *Minerva Musica* in Greece or Italy. Moore's study on Sarasvatī is based on the tenth book of the *Ṛgveda,* as presented in *Asiatic Researches,* Vol. III, and some popular myths connected with the deity. Owing to lack of accurate knowledge in Sanskrit and shortage of archaeological findings, Moore failed to depict the precise position of the deity in all its aspects. But his findings drew the attention of a good number of European scholars who in subsequent times studied on the deity. Vans Kennedy in his *Researches into the Nature and Affinity of Ancient Hindu Mythology*, published in 1831, made some observations on Sarasvatī on the basis of the

Matsya-, *Skanda-* and *Varāha- Purāṇas.* Kennedy tried to give a comprehensive shape to the self-contradictory Puranic legends relating to Sarasvatī, Sāvitrī and Gāyatrī, all being the names of Brahmās wives, and considered them to be synonymous designatng a single divinity. But he did not carefully examine all the Puranic myths and legends. As a result, his study became brief and inconclusive. The next significant publication is the translation of the *'Original Sanskrit Texts'* (Vol. I-V) by James Muir in the year 1873. In Section XX (Vol. V) of the work Muir presented an elaborate picture of Sarasvatī on the basis of his study of the *Vedas*, the *Brāhmanas* and the *Mahābhārata*. He referred to a good number of Vedic and post-Vedic literature and interpreted them in the lines of Sāyana and Yāska. He is of the opinion that Sarasvatī in the *Ṛgveda* is primarily a river-deity and does not appear to be identified with Vāc, the goddess of speech. It is in the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Mahābhārata* that Sarasvatī, the river-goddess, is identified with Vāc, and becomes under different names the wife of Brahmā and the goddess of wisdom and eloquence. Muir further pointed out that the Aryans, after traversing the country of the five rivers had arrived on the banks of the Sarasvatī, settled there for a long period and considered it to be the holiest of all ancient rivers of India. As the river had completely lost in the desert, it is difficult to identify the courses through which it passed. Muir for the first time presented a systematic study on Sarasvatī both as

the river and a deity on the basis of several literary evidences. But the archaeological data did not play any part in his study. It is only thereafter, in an article, entitled 'The Sarasvatī and the Lost River of Indian Desert', published in the *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* in 1893, C. F. Oldham discussed how the Vedic Sarasvatī, a large and rapid river, came to be lost in the sands. Oldham elaborately analysed the literary evidences supplied by James Muir and other scholars. He added to them the archaeological findings relating to the remains of the old river-beds and pointed out how the Sarasvatī had finally disappeared in the sands. His article, as the very name suggests, deals with the river Sarasvatī, that flowed from north to west to reach the sea, and became desiccated and lost in the western desert, However, the aspects of Sarasvatī as a deity of learning, eloquence and wisdom did not find a place in it. W. J. Wilkins' significant publication entitled *Hindu Mythology* came out in 1882. His observations on Brahmā and Sarasvatī (Chapter III) are based on the study of Kennedy and Muir, and no additional information was added to it. This was followed by the publication of *Vedic Mythology* by A. A. Macdonell in 1897. On the basis of his study of the Vedic texts, the learned author referred to Sarasvatī as a river and also as a deity, Later on Macdonell and A. B. Keith published the *Vedic Index* in 1897 and Hopkins came out with his *Epic Mythology* in 1915. These two memorable works helped the scholars of the subsequent times to

analyse the myths and legends connected with the various Brahmanical gods and goddesses. But it should be remembered that their iconographic features did not find any clear recognition in these studies. It was with the discovery of images in the beginning of the twentieth century that the scholars began to analyse individually the peculiarities of the deities belonging to the Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina pantheons.

With the publication of T. A. Gopinath Rao's monumental work, *Elements of Hindu Iconography,* Vols. I & II, in 1914 and 1916, respectively, the scope of researches on Brahmanical images on the basis of *Śilpa*-texts, inscriptions, coins, seals and actual images became expanded. But the work being a compendium on the developments of Brahmanical iconography as a whole, no special attention could be focussed by the learned author on any individual deity, not to speak of a subordinate deity like Sarasvatī. So far the most important contribution in the study of the conceptual and iconographic features of Sarasvatī seems to be the memorable Bengali monograph of A. C. Vidyabhusan, entitled *Sarasvatī,* published in 1933 (1340 B. S.). Vidyabhusan in his work had painstakingly collected information relating to the nature of worship of Sarasvatī prevalent among the Brahmanical Hindus, the Jainas and the Buddhists in ancient and medieval ages. He made us acquainted with a good number of images of the deity found in and outside India. The notes and commentaries appen-

ded to his book are of immense help to us and his method of quoting original verses is no less benefitting. But what is wanting in Vidyabhusan's work is a critical approach to a subject-matter which concerns so many myths and legends recorded in the Vedic, Puranic and epic literature. In the absence of a scientific approach his work apperars to be without any method and direction. As a result, the work becomes rather a catalogue of images without providing a proper perspective. In the random quoting of the verses from the *Vedas, Purāṇas, Sādhanas,* etc., a sheer lack of historical awareness is also noticed. Therefore, in spite of its importance as a pioneer work, for its indifferent treatment it is difficult to accept the monograph as a comprehensive and fully dependable work on the subject.

Haridas Bhattacharjee in the *K. B. Pathak Commemoration Volume*, published in 1934, wrote an article on 'Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning.' This article has come to our help in regard to arranging the textual evidences of the *Vedas*, the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Purāṇas* on Sarasvatī. Subsequently, J. N. Banerjea's *magnum opus*, *The Development of Hindu Iconography,* was published in 1941 and 1956 (2nd revised edition). It deals mainly with the interpretative aspects of the Hindu divinities as well as the process of evolution of the Brahmanical iconography. This is a comprehensive work on some of the major and minor Hindu deities. While discussing the evolution of the concept of Śrī-Lakṣmī and her worship, he had briefly referred to the

nature of worship of Sarasvatī, particularly by the Hindus. Instead of elaborating the topic Banerjea advised his readers to consult the work of N. K. Bhattasali who in his book, *Iconography of the Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum,* published in 1929, treated the topic in more details. But it is to be noted that Bhattasali's discussion on the special features of the Brahmanical and Buddhist images of Sarasvatī is made mostly on the basis of images found in East Bengal, now Bangladesh. As Sarasvatī is known to be worshipped in different parts of the Indian sub-continent in her diverse aspects, it is natural that his study of the goddess could not be a comprehensive one. Since then numerous publications have appeared on the topic, but none of them fulfils the demand of the subject, either from conceptual or from iconic point of view. For example, O. C. Ganguly's paper, 'An image of Sarasvatī in the British Museum' was published in *Rūpam* in 1924. In his article Ganguly has discussed the English rendering of the inscription on the pedestal of the image and its iconographic features. References may also be made to the works of Stella Kramrisch, R. D. Banerjea and Bhagawant Sahai, who made elaborate discussions on some images of Sarasvatī found in different places of India.

As regards the conceptual and iconographic features of Sarasvatī in Buddhist pantheon, we should especially mention the names of Alice Getty and Benoytosh Bhattacharyya for their works *Gods*

of Northern Buddhism and *Indian Buddhist Iconography*, respectively. The *Tantrayāna Art*, edited by S. K. Saraswati and published by the Asiatic Society in 1977, is a recent addition to the subject, and has come to our great help. Nevertheless, these works, primarily dealing with the special features of several Buddhist deities, and sometimes of Sarasvatī of a particular region, do not claim to be extensive studies of the evolution and development of the goddess in and outside India.

U. P. Shah may be regarded a pioneer in the study of Sarasvatī from the Jaina point of view. His article 'Iconography of the Jaina Goddess Sarasvatī' was published in the *Journal of the University of Bombay*, in September 1941. In this article Shah has discussed with the help of textual evidence the iconographical features of a large number of Jaina Sarasvatī images. After classifying the information collected from numerous texts in a systematic scheme, he has studied them in relation to images of the deity discovered from western India as well as other parts of the country. In course of his study Shah has refuted the observations made by B. C. Bhattacharyya in his book '*Jaina Iconography*' on the sixteen Vidyādevīs of the Jainas and concluded that the Vidyādevīs were in no way connected with Śrutadevatā or Sarasvatī. We should record that in preparing our chapter on the Jaina variants of Sarasvatī, we have accepted Shah's views in general.

It is needless to mention that the above rapid

survey of modern researches on Sarasvatī is far from exhaustive and it does not cover the names of all the scholars whose works have come to our help in the preparation of our present work. Their names are, however, given in the *Bibliography* and, whenever felt necessary, also in the *notes*.

III. *Sources for the study on Sarasvatī* :

The materials for the study of the conceptual and iconographic features of Sarasvatī are of two distinct kinds—literary and archaeological. In appraising the importance of these sources in general, and for pointing out difficulties in their study, we propose to take them up under distinct headings.

a. Literary sources : There is no dearth of references to Sarsavatī in the vast literature of ancient and medieval India. Starting from the *Ṛgveda* she is found to be represented in her different aspects in the *Brāhmaṇas*, the Great epics, the *Purāṇas*, the *Āgamas*, the *Tantras* and the *Śilpa*-texts. Besides the Brahmanical tradition, she is also referred to in the Jaina and Buddhist texts. It is natural, therefore, that in different texts, originated from divergent religious and cult backgrounds, Sarasvatī appears with different allusions and forms. Such being the circumstances, we have taken sufficient care to collect all the relevant materials from these extensive literary sources to correlate them with the best possible critical method for revealing the conceptual pattern of the deity by discarding the

superfluous elements in her myths which developed through the centuries. The *Vedas* and the *Brāhmaṇas* are significant for containing information on Sarasvatī in the process of her transformation from a river to a deity. References to Sarasvatī have also been found in the *Mahābhārata* in various contexts. We have discussed them in details under relevant chapters. The *Purāṇas* and the *Upapurāṇas* are of great importance in the study of the conceptual as well as iconic developments of the deity. We have made an exhaustive discussion of all the Puranic myths relating to the position of Sarasvatī and her activities. Some of the *Purāṇas* like the *Mārkaṇḍeya*, the *Matsya*, the *Agni*, the *Skanda*, the *Padma* and the *Brahma-vaivarta* contain sections dealing with the forms of her images. The information collected from these texts are arranged in a separate chapter in order to explain the divergences and distinctive characters of the deity in the changing religious conditions. Casual referenccs noticed in the *Āgamas* like the *Pūrvakaraṇāgama*, the *Aṁśumadbhedāgama*, etc., in connection with the preparation, consecration and the worship of Sarasvatī, have also been taken into account. The *Tantras* and the *Śilpa*-texts deal with the iconographic features and the method of worship. We have especially examined the information found in the *Bṛhat-saṁhitā*, the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, the *Aparājitapṛcchā*, the *Śilparatna* and the *Rūpamaṇḍana*. From our survey of these *Śilpa*-texts it would be apparent that they discussed

developments of Sarasvatī covering a period from the 6th century A. D. to the 16th century A. D. References have also been made to the various *dhyāna-mantras* of Sarasvatī which are incorporated in the works of rituals connected with the method of her worship. As the *dhyānas* of Sarasvatī obtained from the Brahmanical, Jaina and Buddhist texts do not always agree with each other, we have compared and examined the conflicting types of the deity belonging to different times and regions before arriving at a dependable interpretation,

In collecting information about Sarasvatī from the various branches of literature, we have faced some difficulties. First, for the defective reading of some texts we had to make collated studies on them to obtain a dependable reading. Secondly, discrepancies in the narration of the myths of the deity in different Puranic texts are noted, and in such cases we have tried our best to offer the basic story by eliminating their superfluous aspects. Thirdly, there are conflicting stories regarding the status of the deity in some texts, and to reconcile them we have approached the problem from an evolutionary viewpoint.

b. Archaeological sources : The iconographical study of Sarasvatī is chiefly based on archaeological finds of northern and southern India which include stone sculptures, bronze statuettes, seals, paintings and epigraphical and numismatic evidences. The vast span of time stretching from the 2nd century B. C. to the 16th century A. D. have yielded

numerous images of the goddess to provide a material support to the information gathered from various literary sources. Some of the images show clear iconographic features, while others are damaged by men or nature. References have also been made to some new types of images which throw interesting light on the iconic features of thc deity. But there are the problems relating to agreement between the textual prescriptions and the forms of the extant images. Iconographic features of many early and late medieval Sarasvatī images are found to tally completely with the textual descriptions. But there are numerous other images whose forms can only be partially explained by the texts. Occasionally, we meet with the images of the deity which are found to be difficult to account for with the help of known iconographic literature. The problems relating to such apparent discrepancies between the images and the texts could not always be satisfactorily solved. But images of Sarasvatī collected from Ghantasala, Bharhut and Mathura belonging to the early Christian era may amply prove that the salient iconographic features of the deity took a cognizable shape as early as the Śūṅga and the Kuṣāṇa periods. Sarasvatī was in all likelihood primarily a Brahmanical goddess, conceptually evolved out of the Vedic myths, and thus her acceptance to the Jainas and the Buddhists possibly evolved of a common heritage. But inspite of apparent conceptual transformations, some of her distinct iconographic features were all

through maintained. As time passed, her iconographical characteristics went through modification and ramification, obviously to meet the requisites of the creed to which she belonged and also to satisfy the regional predilections. In the medieval temples of Orissa, East and West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujrat, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, etc., we thus find exquisite images of Sarasvatī showing different iconic types in distinctive regional styles. In fact, we have relied more on such archaeological evidences than on the information collected from literature and as such they provide the material background of our dissertation.

We have also noted the representation of the deity as found on the coins of Samācāradeva (C. 550-575 A. D.), a predecessor of Śaśāṅka of Gauḍa. Several paintings exhibiting the goddess in sitting or standing postures have also been discovered from different places of the Indian sub-continent. We have taken into consideration all such materials before suggesting correlations between the textual descriptions and the various kinds of representations.

II

SARASVATĪ IN THE EARLY VEDIC LITERATURE

The early Vedic literature represents the deities in the process of their making. Concepts and ideas relating to the spiritual members of the age appear to be in between abstract notions and tangible imagery. The Vedic gods and goddesses are generally half-revealed and half-concealed ; and this seems to be especially true so far as their anthropomorphic shapes are concerned, No doubt, some of them are visualised as sons and daughters of the heaven and earth, and noted as presiding spirits of innumerable natural phenomena, such as, sky and ether, sun and moon, forests and trees, ponds and brooks, etc ; but seldom their personal forms are clearly defined. For instance, Viṣṇu of the Vedic period is only a notion, a conglomeration of several ideas ; and he is not yet distinctly personified, his iconic traits are far from being crystalised. Again, in the Vedic literature usually the male deities are prominently mentioned, while the goddesses are assigned to a less significant position. However, the Vedic ṛṣis attach importance to such female deities as Aditi, the Divine Mother, Uṣās, the Goddess of Dawn, Pṛthivī, the Mother Earth, and Vāc, the Goddess of Speech. In comparison

Sarasvatī appears to occupy a moderate position in the *Ṛgveda,* though she is known both as a river and a goddess (*dvividhā hi sarasvatī vigrahavat devatā nadi rūpā ca*).[1] As a river she maintained the boundary of Brahmāvarta, the homeland of the early Aryans, and was regarded by them to be the most sacred of all ancient rivers, The priests and sages performed sacrifices to her. As a goddess she is endowed with purifying powers. She is also invoked as a source of vitality, fame and riches. She is found to be associated with the deities like Puṣaṇ, Indra, Maruts. Aśvins and others and formed in particular a triad with two other sacrificial goddesses, viz., Iḍā and Bhāratī,

I. Sarasvatī the river :

The word 'Sarasvatī' refers to a 'region abounding in pools and lakes' (*sarasvatī saraḥ ity udaka nāma sartes tadvati*).[2] It also means flowing, a characteristic applicable both to the river and the goddess of eloquence. As a river Sarasvatī is supposed to sanctify all waters used for worship. From the Ṛgvedic times she is associated with the mystic number seven,[3] which alludes to the seven great streams flowing through the early Aryan settlements in India. The *Āvesta* also mentions the *Hapta-hindu* and the beautiful *Haraquti.* The seven people[4] living along the banks of Sapta Sindhu[5] are also referred to in the *Ṛgveda.* Again, the *Ṛgveda* mentions the nourishment or purification of the Soma by seven sisters or rivers (*sapta-*

svasāro, sapta yahvīḥ.)[6] There is no doubt that even though the number of sacred streams was mythically fixed at seven, the identity of individual members of the group varied from time to time indicating the gradual eastward extension of the Aryan settlement.

While the assemblage of the seven rivers shifted south-eastward, the name Sarasvatī came generally to be applied to the eastern most boundary of the advancing Aryan settlement. It has been successively identified with Oxus, the Arghandab in Arāchosia,[7] the Gandhāra river referred to in the *Avesta,* the Indus,[8] the Sutlej and the modern Sarsuti.[9] The first two identifications are questionable, but there is at least some justification for identifying it with the four other streams. The association of Sarasvatī with Gandhāra and the *Gandharvas* is very old. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* refers to the bartering of Sarasvatī for the Soma[10] with the *Gandharvas* by the gods. The *Gandharvas* are also mentioned in the later literature as having pilgrimages (*tīrthas*) on her banks,[11] presumably because they were the exponents of music, song and dance. The strong current, the descent from the hills.[12] and the possession of many tributaries and branches,[13] the qualities usually attributed to Sarasvatī make her identification with the Indus easy. But the reference to Sarasvatī's origin in the Mānasa-sarobara, the known source of the Sutlej, points to its apparent oneness with the latter. Besides, the dry bed of a river, archaeologically

known as a tributary of Śatadru (Sutlej), is to be found in the regions of Patiala, Bhawalpur and Bikaner,[14] and this reminds the later story of the *Purāṇas* regarding *Sarasvatī's* desiccation in the deserts. It may, however, be noted that from the time of *Manu-Saṁhitā* and the *Mahābhārata* Sarasvatī came to be identified with the stream which formed the boundary of Brahmāvarta,[1] separating it from Madhyadeśa, Brahmakṣetra or Kurukṣetra, and which was lost in the desert. This indicates the movement of the denotation further east. Whether the river flowed directly into the present Arabian Sea or into a Rajputana sea is not clear to us for the present, but the literary references make it apparent that it had a direct access to the sea.[16]

The Sarasvatī is addressed along with the Gaṅgā, Yamuṇā, Śatadru, Paruṣṇī and other known and unknown rivers.[17] She is also invoked as a great stream,[18] and eulogised in various sections of the *Ṛgveda*. The ṛṣis performed sacrifices on the banks of this river as also beside the adjoining Dṛṣadvatī. She was reputed for her sanctity: 'I place thee, Agni, on the abode of Iḍā, on the most excellent spot of the earth, on the most auspicious of days. Shine, so as to enrich us, in a place of human resort, on the bank of Dṛṣadvatī, the Āpayā, the Sarasvatī.'[19] The reason for ascribing sanctity to the Sarasvatī is not far to seek; hymns and sacrifices arose perpetually from the devout Bhāratas on her banks, and even the origins of the world and

the *Vedas* were sought in the same place. The waters of the Sarasvatī began to be used in the Brahmanic worship in connection with the removal of sins committed at any time of the day or night in the *āpomārjana* practice.[20] She gradually took the foremost place in the list of the seven streams which were in times imagined as sisters. Thus the river had acquired a sacred character and was naturally regarded as the patroness of ceremonies which were celebrated on the borders of her holy waters.

II. Sarasvatī the goddess :

Sarasvatī as a goddess is frequently invited to the sacrifices along with several other goddesses like Iḍā, Bhāratī, Hotrā, Varūtri, Dhiṣaṇā,[21] and is also invoked along with other deities.[22] But she is especially known for intimate association with Indra and the twin Aśvins. In many a hymn Sarasvati and Aśvins are praised together. It is they who advised Indra to slay Namuchi,[23] forge the thunderbolt for him out of foam[24] and tend him to recovery.[25] It seems that for her healing properties Sarasvatī came to be associated with the Aśvins, the divine physicians, Again, in the *Atharva-veda* she appears as curing the worms of the children[26] and poisoning in general, from which her association with Manasā, the goddess of snakes, may be assumed.

Sarasvatī is further mentioned along with the rivers which are perennial sources of water for

the arable lands. She is one who offers wealth, progeny and vitality : "Ye opulent waters command riches ; ye possess excellent power and immortality ; ye are the mistress of wealth and progeny ; may Sarasvatī bestow this vitality on her worshippers."[27] She is also said to have surpassed all rivers that flow pure waters from the mountains to sea.[28] She tears away like a digger of the roots of plants, the bases of the mountains on her banks with her impetuous and resounding current.[29] She is distinguished by the greatness among the great and the swiftest of the floods ; she is the most active and is implored not to withhold her milk,[30] that is her water. She became at once the foremost of the mothers, the best of the rivers and the greatest of the goddesses.[31] Hence, already in the early Vedic period Sarasvatī is found to have acquired great divine powers.

Further, a river god called Sārasvata[32], conceived as a consort of Sarasvatī, and offering fertilizing waters, is invoked by the worshippers who seek to him wives and offsprings as well as plenty and protection. In the *Ṛgveda*[33] Sarasvatī is called upon to descend from the sky, from the great mountains to the place of sacrifice. She is also mentioned as the daughter of lightning (*pāviravi kanyā*),[34] and the wife of hero (*vīrapatni*)[35]. She is conjured to combine with spouses of the gods for securing protection to the worshippers. Thus a celestial origin is assigned to the river mentioning her as the offspring of thunder and rain.

Elsewhere Sarasvatī is said to fill the terrestial regions and the air and thus takes possession of three abodes. She restrains the attack of advancing enemies like an iron-barrier or a fortress and a support.[36] She bestows wealth, and fertility[37] and besought to listen to the prayer of her worshippers at their sacrifices,[38] to receive their praises, to shelter and protect them like a tree,[39] and to grant reputation to the unrenowned.[40] She is represented as having given to Vadryāsva a son and Divodāsa an incitation to the fulfilment of obligation.[41] She is said to be coming to the place of sacrifice in the same chariot with oblations.[42] Her waters are unctuous with butter and she alone can undertake the supply to Nahuṣa with butter and milk for a thousand years' sacrifice.[43] Along with Iḍā and Bhāratī she forms the triple tongue of the sacrificial fire[44] and, because she is identical with speech, pouring of purified butter (*ghee*) on her waters was forbidden. She also directs, stimulates and causes prosperity of her devotees. She affords protection, conquers enemies[45] and destroys the abusers of the gods.[46] She is dreadful, moves along a golden path and is a destroyer of Vṛtra.[47] The worshippers seek prosperity and riches of all descriptions from her prolific breasts.[48] She being the receptacle of all powers of life, bestows offsprings,[49] and assists procreation.[50]

From the above discussion it is clear that Sarasvatī was conceived by the Vedic ṛṣis primarily

as a river and secondarily as a goddess with varied potentialities. Whenever they thought of the river, they thought of the benevolent deity. They prayed to her for permanent shelter, peace and happiness. "Guide us, Sarasvatī, to precious wealth, reduce us not to insignificance ; overwhelm us not with excesss of water ; be pleased by the friendly services and access to our habitation and let us not to repair to places unacceptable to thee".[51] Thus, originally a river deity, already in the *Ṛgveda* Sarasvatī becomes a formidable goddess capable of offering protection, wealth and all other material and spiritual things to her worshippers. Thus Sarasvatī the river transcends to Sarasvatī the omnipotent goddess in the concept of the Aryans.

III. *Vāc and Sarasvatī* :

We may next try to ascertain the position of Vāc vis-a-vis Sarasvatī in the *Ṛgveda*, and mark the manner in which the two goddesses are connected with each other. Vāc is speech personified and is referred to in more than one occasion as an active and important goddess.[52] She herself narrates her origin, association and attributes. She is a goddess who provides sustenance and nourishment to the holy sages, who perform sacrifices and offer oblations to her. As the daughter of Abhṛṇa, she praises herself as the supreme universal soul. Literally, Vāc signifies speech, but in actuality, as we know from the Ṛgvedic hymns, she is the

active power or Śakti of Brahmā and is endowed with the attributes of creation. She is invoked as the ultimate source of primary elements from which the universe came to existence. She is the personification of wisdom and eloquence and is praised as a Muse. The following extract of the *Ṛgveda*[53] will reveal her origin, and attributes : "I am associated with the Rudras, the Vasus, the Ādityas and the Viśvadevas. I uphold both the sun and the ocean (*Mitra and Varuṇa*), the firmament (*Indra*), fire (*Agni*) and both the *Aśvins.* I uphold *Soma,* the destroyer of foes and sustain *Tvastri, Puṣān* and *Bhaga.* I grant wealth to the devout worshippers who perform sacrifices, offer oblations and satisfy the deities. I am the queen, the conferer of treasures, the possessor of knowledge, the first among the the Holy ones and pervader of all beings. He who eats food through me, as he who sees, who breathes or who hears through me, yet knows me not, is lost. Hear then the faith which I pronounce. I declare that I am worshipped by the gods and men, I can make a man exceedingly mighty, a Brāhmaṇa, a ṛṣi, a gifted man. I can stretch the bow for Rudra, to slay the fierce enemy of the holy man. I can rouse and order battle for the people and spread through heaven and carth. I bring forth the father on the head of the universal mind ; my origin is within the waters, in the midst of ocean from where I extend to all existing worlds and touch heaven with my forehead. It is I who like

the wind breathe forth and set all existing world in motion. I am above the heaven and beyond this wide earth and what is the Great one, that am I."

It appears from the above narration that Vāc accompanies all the gods and supports Mitra, Varuṇa, Indra, Agni and the Aśvins. She bends Rudra's bow against the unbelievers. She resides inside the water and encompasses all beings. She is called the queen of the gods and the divines. She is also enumerated as the deity of atmosphere and thunder or as the *madhyamikā* Vāc, the voice of the middle region.

It is clear from the above account that the principal idea underlying the concept of these two deities —Vāc and Sarasvatī—is that of good fortune which brings in blissful prosperity and abundance. Sarasvatī as a river goddess offers sustenance and nourishment to the Vedic sages who performed sacrifices on the banks of the Sarasvatī. She is regarded as the holiest of all ancient rivers and called upon to descend from the sky, from the great mountain to the sacrifices.[54] She is further described as the daughter of lightning and the wife of a hero. Vāc also resides in the region imtermediate between heaven and earth and is supplicated to combine with the spouses of the gods to afford protection to the worshippers. Thus a celestial origin is offered to both the deities and they were known to be the offsprings of thunder and lightning.

Whatever may be the nature of association

between Vāc and Sarasvatī, it should be noted that in the *Ṛgveda* they are represented as two separate deities. It is only in the later Vedic literature that these two deities, by the association of ideas, came closer to each other and finally became identified as a single divinity. This identification is possible owing to the fact that both of them possess some common characteristics and are associated with a number of common deities. Sarasvatī is found to be engaged in a healing sacrifice along with Aśvins and through speech she communicates vigour to Indra. Vāc also declares herself as the supreme deity, upholds Indra, Agni and both the Aśvins and sustains Tvastrī, Puṣaṇ and Bhaga. The association of Vāc and Sarasvatī with such common deities, especially with the Aśvins, is striking and noteworthy. From such common qualities and associations it is not unlikely that the process of identification of Vāc with Sarasvatī had its beginning in the early Vedic period, but it was completed only in the subsequent times.

We may note that in the *Ṛgveda,* Sarasvatī, though acclaimed for so many virtues, is never raised to such power and position as assigned to Vāc who is regarded as the supreme, independent and universal soul. Although Vāc is eulogised only in two whole hymns of the *Ṛgveda,* she is the means of communication between the heaven and the earth and responsible for the constant assimilation of varied phenomena of the nature to the sacrifice. She is the embodiment of the re-

awakening of life at dawn with songs of rejoicing over the new birth of the world. She serves as the ultimate source of primary elements, a representation of spirits and also the means of communication between men and gods. She is depicted as being created by Prajāpati and finally married to him in order to maintain procreation. It may thus be presumed that in spite of her limited references the *Ṛgveda*, Vāc plays a vital and significant role in the process of creation and sustention and precedes Sarasvatī and all othar independent and subordinate female deities in the early Vedic pantheon.

The Aryans after entering India had settled themselves on the banks of the river Sarasvatī having clear and pure water congenial to a peaceful religious life. Holy rites and ceremonies were performed there and a new culture developed in the region. The small tract of land thus became a place of pilgrimage and the sacred river attained the position of the goddess of abundance and nourishment. Thus the goddess Sarasvatī, originating out of her riverine identity, all through maintained a separate role and in general had no traditional connection with Vāc, the goddess of speech. To conclude, in the *Ṛgveda* Sarasvatī and Vāc are found to be two distinct goddesses concurrently worshipped and invoked by the early Vedic Aryans.

Notes and References

1. Sāyana on *R. V.* i, 3, 12.
2. *Nirukta,* IX, 26.
3. *R. V.* viii, 24, 27 ; vii, 26, 6 ; v, 43, 1.
4. *R. V.* viii, 39, 8.
5. *R. V.* viii, 96, 1.
6. *R. V.* ix, 86, 36 ; ix, 92, 4.
7. Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index.* ii, p. 437.
8. *R. V.* vii, 95, 1-2 ; vi, 62, 2 ; vii, 36, 6 ; x, 64, 9.
9. Macdonell and Keith, *op, cit.* ii, p. 435ff.
10. *Ait. Br.* 1. 27.
11. *Mahābhārata* : *Śalya Parva,* xxxvii, v, 11.
12. *R. V.* vi, 61, 2 ; vi, 61, 8 ; vi, 61, 13.
13. *R. V.* vii, 36, 6.
14. *J. R. A. S.*, 1893, pp. 56-59.
15. *J. R. A. S.* 1893; p. 49ff.
16. *R. V.* vii, 95. 1-2.
17. *R. V.* x, 75. 3.
18. *R. V.* x, 64, 9.
19. *R. V.* iii, 23, 4.
20. *R. V.* i, 23, 22, vi, 49, 7 ; x, 17, 10.
21. *R. V.* i. 13, 9 ; i. 188, 8 ; iii, 4. 8 ; v, 5. 8 ; ix, 5, 8 ; x, 110, 8.
22. *R. V.* ii, 30, 8 ; iii, 54, 13, v, 42, 12, vii, 35, 11. viii, 38, 10. ix, 81, 4, x, 65, 1-13, x, 141, 5.
23. *R. V.* vi, 61. 3, x, 131, 4.
24. *R. V.* viii, 14, 13.
25. *R. V.* x, 131, 5.
26. *A. V.* v, 23, *R. V.* i, 191, 13-14.
27. *R. V.* x, 30, 12.
28. *R. V.* vii, 95, 1-2.
29. *R. V.* vi, 61, 2 & 8.
30. *R. V.* vi, 61, 13.
31. *R. V.* ii, 41, 16.
32. *R. V.* vii, 96, 4-6 ; *R. V.* x, 85, 47.

33. *R. V.* v, 43, 11.
34. *R. V.* vi, 49, 7.
35. *R. V.* vii, 96, 4-6 ; x, 65, 13.
36. *R. V.* vii, 95, 1.
37. *R. V.* vii, 95. 2.
38. *R. V.* x, 95, 4.
39. *R. V.* x, 95, 5.
40. *R. V.* ii, 41, 16.
41. *R. V.* vi, 61, 1.
42. *R. V.* x, 17, 8.
43. *R. V.* vii, 95, 2.
44. *R. V.* ii, 1, 11 ; ii, 3, 8 ; v. 42, 12 ; x, 110, 8.
45. *R. V.* ii, 30, 8 ; vi, 49, 7.
46. *R. V.* vi, 61, 3.
47. *R. V.* vi, 61, 7.
48. *R. V.* i, 89, 3 ; viii, 21, 17 ; x, 17, 8 & 9 ; ix, 67, 32 ; i, 164, 49.
49. *R. V.* ii, 41, 17.
50. *R. V.* x, 184, 2.
51. *R. V.* vi, 61, 14.
52. *R. V.* viii, 89, 10-11 ; x, 71, 1-7.
53. *R. V.* x, 125, 1-8.
54. *R. V.* v, 43, 11.

III

SARASVATĪ IN THE LATERVEDIC LIETERATURE AND THE EPICS

In the *Ṛgveda* Sarasvatī and Vāc are represented as two separate deities. While Sarasvatī is regarded as a deity of secondary importance, Vāc as speech personified occupies a supreme position. Vāc is further recognised as the embodiment of *śakti* or energic principle. Although Vāc and Sarasvatī establish close association with Agni, Puṣaṇ, Maruts and Aśvins, they maintain their individual peculiartities throughout the *Ṛgvedic* period. As time elapsed the associatson becomes closer and finally Sarasvatī and Vāc with all their qualities and attributes are identified as a single deity. The river Sarasvatī had subsequently acquired a divine character and was regarded as a patroness of ceremonies, which included the chanting of *mantras*, and had, as such, prepared the background for identifying herself with Vāc, the goddess of speech. In the later Vedic literature Sarasvatī is called the *Vedas*, and the same is said of Vāc in the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Bṛhad-devatā*. No wonder that most of the synonyms of Sarasvatī connect her with speech. As divine wisdom is expressed through speech, Sarasvatī becomes the wife of Brahmā and the revealer of the Vedic lore. Her intermediate

identification with Vāc, the female seer of learning, might have expedited the process that raised her to a divine status. Thus the river association of Sarasvatī, so frequently met with in the *Ṛgveda*, recedes into the background in the *Brāhmaṇas* and her divine aspect comes to the forefront. Later on she has also been mentioned as the wife of Indra, as one who contains within herself all worlds, and being sought after by the sages.

In several passages of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* Sarasvatī and Vāc are mentioned as a single divinity : "Flow to Sarasvatī, Sarasvatī doubtless is Vāc (*sarasvatai pinvasveti* : *vāgvai sarasvatī*)".[1] Vāc is here a female divinity of the upper region, the guardian of waters and the bestower of fertility. In an explicit language it is narrated how the work of creation was contemplated by Prajāpati in association with her. Prajāpati desired, "May I multiply, may I be propagated." He pronounced in devotion ; he practised austere-fervour. Having done so he first of all created sacred knowledge, the three-fold Vedic science. This became a basis for him. Wherefore men may say, sacred knowledge is the basis for the universe. Hence after studying the *Vedas* a man has the standing ground, for sacred knowledge is his foundation. Resting on this basis Prajāpati practised austere-fervour. He created the water from Vāc (speech) as their world. Vāc was his : she was created. She pervaded all this whatever exists. As she pervaded (*āpnot*), waters were called *āpah*. As she covered

(*avṛnot*) all, water was called *Vār*."[2] Elsewhere it is stated that creation was preceded by speech : a celestial voice without beginning or end was uttered by Svayambhu (i. e. Prajāpati) from which all activities proceeded. According to the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*,[3] Vāc is an imperishable thing, and the first born of the ceremonials, the mother of the *Vedas* and the centre-point of immortality. Delighting us, she came to sacrifice. May the protecting goddess be ready to listen to her invocation—she whom the *ṛṣis*, the composers of hymns, the gods, sought by austere-fervour and by laborious devotion. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* Vāc is designated as a cow. Let a man worship the cow Vāc. She has four udders, each representing a formula, viz. *svahā*, *vaṣat*, *hanta* and *svadhā*. The gods live upon her two udders, *svahā* and *vaṣat* ; men upon *hanta*, and the fathers upon *svadhā*. Breath is her bull, the mind is her calf.[4] Vāc has thus been identified here with cow and as such reminds us Sarasvatī's similar identification with the same benevolent animal.

In an interesting legend of the *Yajurveda*[5] the emergence of Vāc and Sarasvatī as a single divinity appears to have been narrated. The gods arranged a healing sacrifice, where Aśvins as well as Vāc as physicians were present, and all of them offered vigour to Indra. Elsewhere, Sarasvatī is mentioned as Vāgdevī for the reason that with the help of speech she offered vigour to Indra.

In some of the legends of the *Brāhmaṇas*, Vāc's

independent association with king Soma and the Gandharvas is also mentioned. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*[6] states how king Soma was obtained by the gods from the Gandharvas. The gods and the ṛṣis desired him and said, 'How shall we get him to come to us?' Vāc said, 'The Gandharvas are fond of females; buy him in exchange of me turned into a female.' They answered, 'No, how can we live without thee?' She rejoined, 'Buy him and whenever you have occasion for me, I shall return to you.' They agreed, turned Vāc into a female and in exchange of her brought king Soma. The *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*[7] tells the same story, but says that the gods turned Vāc into a woman, one year old; and that after she had gone they induced her by singing and playing on flute to come back.

The *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*,[8] however, gives a variant of the story and relates that the Soma existed formerly in the sky, while the gods were on the earth. They in order to offer it in the sacrifice sent Gāyatrī to bring it for them. While she was carrying it off, the Gandharva Vibhāvasu robbed her of it. The gods knowing the inclincation of the Gandharvas for females sent Vāc, the goddess of speech, to get it for them, which she succeeded in doing. It is further stated that Vāc was created by Brahmā who had incestuous love for his own creation. The story relating to this licentious action of Brahmā is further elaborated in the *Matsya, Bhāgavata* and other *Purāṇas*.

In another legend of the *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*

the circumstances leading to the transformation of Vāc into a lioness has been mentioned. The gods (*Ādityas*) performed the Soma sacrifice and Agni was there as the officiating priest. At the completion of the rite Vāc was offered to the demons (*Aṅgirayas*) as a gift (*dakṣinā*), but the demons refused to accept her on the ground that it would bring misfortune for them. When Sūrya (the Sun) was selected as her substitute, and the demons were pleased to accept him, Vāc being displeased took the form of a lioness and began to kill the gods and the demons. Finally, at the mediation of Agni Saharakṣa the dispute was settled up and Vāc remained with the gods. The story relating to the transformation of Vāc to a lioness is also stated in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* (iii, 187).

The *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* also mentions that Sarasvatī along with other gods and goddesses takes away all the attributes of the goddess Śrī who brings in blissful prosperity and abundance. There it is stated that Prajāpati got tired in creating beings and Śrī came to him while he was in the fatigue, The gods and goddesses were envious of her beauty and resplendence and wanted to kill her. But Prajāpati dissuaded them from doing so, as she was a female and asked them to take away all her qualities sparing only her life. Agni, Soma, Varuṇa, Indra, Mitra, Bṛhaspati, Sāvitrī, Puṣan, Sarasvatī, and Tvastṛ took away from her food, kingdom, universal sovereignty, noble rank, power, holy lustre, dominion, wealth, prosperity and beautiful

form, respectively. Hence we note that Sarasvatī obtained the virtue of prosperity from the goddess Śrī. However, afterwards on Prajāpati's advice, Śrī restored all her qualities by offering ten sacrificial dishes to the ten divinities. It is further related in the *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* that Sarasvatī by curing Indra received ram and ewes as her reward. Thereafter ram became associated with Sarasvatī. 'He goats are sacred to the Aśvins, ewes to Sarsvatī and cows (and bulls) to Indra ; they say : if these animals are sacrificed, he (the sacrificer) by means of these deities gains those (three) animals.'[9]

A close study of the later Vedic literature shows that during the period of their composition the two Ṛgvedic deities, Vāc and Sarasvatī became identified. But in some of the myths, connecting Vāc with Soma and the Gandharvas, she figures as an individual having no immediate connection with Sarasvatī. However, on several occasions, the *Brāhmaṇas* clearly state that the concepts of the two Ṛgvedic deities, Vāc and Sarasvatī, whose origins and attributes were primarily different, came to be combined together and were completely identified. The amalgamation, transformation and identification of these two deities had passed through several stages and ultimately led to the formation of the new concept of Vāgdevī. On the banks of the Sarasvatī the Vedic rituals were practised and *mantras* were recited. These sacred activities sanctified the river

and ultimately turned her into a deity. Again, Vāc or speech, an element indispensable for the spread and development of the scriptures, was also personified as a deity. These two deities, notwithstanding their separate and individual peculiarities, are found mentioned as a single divinity in the *Brāhmaṇas*, wherein Sarasvatī and Vāc are regarded as the same goddesses—'Sarasvatī is Vāc' (*vāgvai sarasvatī*).

In the *Mahābhārata* Sarasvati is called the mother of the Vedas (*Vedānām mātaram paśya*)[10] and the daughter of Brahmā (*ṛta brahmāsutā devī*).[11] The same is said of Vāc in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*[12] (*Vāc akṣaraṁ prathamajā ṛtasya Vedānām mātā amṛtasya nābhiḥ*). Again, it is related in the great epic that prior to the creation of the universe when the Brahmarṣis were performing austerities, 'a voice derived from Brahmā entered into the ears of them all ; the celestial Sarasvatī was then formed out of the heaven'.[13] She is further described as '*devijihvā sarasvatī*' and '*jihvāyām vāc sarasvatī.*'

In the *Bhiṣma-parvan*[14] of the *Mahābhārata* Acyuta (Kṛṣṇa) is said to have created Sarasvatī and *Vedas* from his mind. Gāyatrī who is identified with Sarasvatī is also called the mother of the *Vedas* in the *Vana-parvan.*[15] Moreover, some information about Sarasvatī's position during the days of the composition of the great epic may be had from the *Tārkṣya Sarasvatī Saṁvāda* in the *Vana-parvan.* Mārkaṇḍeya related how Sarasvatī instructed Tārkṣya about the celestial regions and

especially about the virtues of different scriptures to the Brāhmaṇas. Then she spoke of the Agnihotra sacrifice where she had come to clean away the doubts and misunderstanding of the priests (Brāhmaṇas). Thereafter Tārkṣya addressed her as a deity of wisdom and intelligence, and wanted to know her origin and attributes. She disclosed that she was created out of the good works of the sacrifice. She could remove the doubts of the sages and was able to show the paths leading to the attainment of salvation. She advised Tārkṣya to perform the Agnihotra sacrifice in order to enjoy the supreme bliss or happiness.

The details of the pilgrimages around the banks of the Sarasvatī, the sacred river, have also been narrated in the *Mahābhārata.* But this description differs much from that of the *Vedas.* In the *Vedas* Sarasvatī is a large and rapid river flowing from mountains to the sea. In the *Mahābhārata* the same river is described as a stream that loses itself in the sand. This river, wide and rapid during the floods, contains little water in other seasons of the year. In the *Ṛgveda* nothing is said of the disappearance of Sarasvatī in the sand. Though it is difficult to determine specifically the time when the Sarasvatī had disappeared in the desert, it is at least possible to state that the river lost much of its potentiality sometime after the Vedic age, but before the composition of the *Śalya-parvan* of the *Mahābhārata,* when the water of the sacred river did no longer flow to the sea.

According to the *Manu-saṁhitā*,[16] the narrow tract called Brahmāvarta, lying between the Sarasvatī and the Dṛṣadvatī, had been for a considerable period the seat of some of the most distinguished sages of ancient time. As a result several Brahmanical institutions and pilgrimages grew up along the banks of the Sarasvatī. These places became famous for collection and compilation of the hymns of the *Vedas*. Thus it is easy to ascertain why sacred character was assigned to the small tract of land lying between the Sarasvatī and the Dṛṣadvatī. The *Mahābhārata* also attaches great importance to the sacredness of this place. It states, 'Those who dwell in Kurukṣetra, south of the Sarasvatī and the north of the Dṛṣadvatī, dwell in heaven.'[17] It further states that 'it is a place where the beautiful and sacred river used to flow previously and it has now been the spot where the Sarasvatī disappears. Here is the gate of the Niṣādas and it was owing to her hatred for them that she sank into the earth.'[18] From the *Mahābhārata* we may further learn that Baladeva (Balarāma) proceeded to Vināśana where the Sarasvatī became invisible in consequence of her contempt for Śūdras and Ābhiras. Nevertheless, Vināśana was the abode of Vyāsa, the compiler of the *Vedas* and the *Purāṇas*. Sometime when the *Vedas* had fallen into disuse and were forgotten, the priests (i. e. the Brāhmaṇas) were then instructed by Sārasvata, the son of Sarasvatī, about the *Vedas*. It is stated that a twelve years' drought

occurred ; the great ṛṣis travelled hither and thither in search of food and thus lost the *Vedas* (*teṣām kṣudhā parītānām naṣṭaḥ vedā abhidhāvatām*).[19] Even the great Sārasvata was about to depart, but was dissuaded by Sarasvatī. She said, 'Go not hence, my son ; I shall give you excellent fish for food." He accordingly remained there and preserved the *Vedas* (*prāṇām Vedāṁśca dhārayam*) and communicated them again to the ṛṣis at their desire.

The *Mahābhārata* has further mentioned that it was on the banks of the Sarasvatī that Kṛṣṇa, Bhārata and Bālakhilya had performed sacrifices and the place was described as a sacred one (*puṇyatīrtha*). The Daibatavana and the Kāmyakavana were on the banks of the Sarasvatī and the Paṇḍavas lived there ; the hermitage of Dadhīci was also situated on its bank. It is further stated that at the sacrifice of Yayāti, the Sarasvatī produced milk (*dugdham*) and thickened milk (*kṣīram*) and the sage Vaśiṣṭha praised highly of her sacredness. She had risen from the Mānasa lake (*pitāmahasya sarasaḥ*) and the whole universe was filled with her waters. She is the source of growth (*puṣṭi*), splendour (*dyuti*), fame (*kīrti*), success (*siddhi*), intellect (*buddhi*), speech (*vāc*) and consecration (*svahā*). It was finally stated in the *Mahābhārata* that the sixteen hundred wives of Kṛṣṇa had plunged into the waters of the Sarasvatī.

From the above passages it would at least

appear that there had been a time when the sacred stream did not lose itself in the sand. It seems that while during the Vedic period the Sarasvatī flowed throughout the year, it turned to be a seasonal river in the days when Kṛṣṇa made his exploits. Although the Vedic account of the Sarasvatī differs much from those of the *Mahābhārata*, it is very unlikely that the river to which so important a position is assigned in the Brahmanical writings, could ever have lost its identity, or that its name and sacred character could have been transferred to another stream. It is almost certain that the Sarasvatī of the present day is the river mentioned in the *Vedas* and the *Mahābhārata.* It had been the resort of pilgrims from the earliest time ; and it flowed through the holy land of Kurukṣetra, which was sacred even before the great war of the *Mahābhārata*, but the river became lost into sand during the last phase of its composition. Thus, the *Mahābhārata* being composed in a period covering eight hundred years, say from 500 B. C. to 300 A. D., the Sarasvatī may be assumed to have disappeared in the desert sometime around the beginning of the Christian era. We may, therefore, note that the river concept of the deity continued to the date of the *Mahābhārata*, though she is found to be developed as a deity concept already in the *Ṛgveda.* Thus, in spite of a steady conceptual emergence of Sarasvatī as a goddess in the later Vedic literature, the entire period depicted

therein as also the period of the great epic, continues to be a phase of transition between the Vedic and Puranic concepts regarding her. It may be noted in this connection that there is hardly any reference to Vāc and her association with Sarasvatī in the *Mahābhārata*, which is a significant departure from the early Vedic trend, and thus Sarasvatī appears to have been very much recognised both as a deity and a river during, at least, the latter period of composition of the great epic.

Notes and References

1. *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*, xiv, 2, 1, 12.
2. *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*, vi, 1, 1, 1-10.
3. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, ii, 8, 8, 5.
4. *Bṛhad Āraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, p. 982 (Dr. Roer's Edn.).
5. *Yajurveda*, 19, 12.
6. *Ait. Brāh.*, i, 27, cf. Muir, J. O. S. T. Vol. v, p. 263.
7. *Taittirīya. Brāh*, vi, 1, 6, 5.
8. *Sat. Brāh.*, iii, 2, 4, 1 & 2.
9. *Sat. Brāh.*, xii, 7, 1, 7, 2, cf. *Sat. Brāh.* Egglings Translation, vol. v, S. B. E., vol. XLIV, p. 218.
10. *Mahābhārata* : *Śānti-parvan* : Verse 12920.
11. *Ibid* : Verse 13234.
12. *Taitt. Brāh* : ii. 8, 8, 5.
13. *Mahābhārata* : *Sāntiparvan* : v. 6811.
14. *Mahābhārata* : *Bhiṣma-parvan* : Verse 3019.
15. *Ibid* : *Vana-parvan* : Verse 13432.
16. *Manu-saṁhitā*, ii. 17.
17. *Mahābhārata* : *Śalya-parvan* : Verse 5074.
18. *Ibid* : Verse 10, 538.
19. *Mahābhārata* : *Śalya-parvan* : Verse 2960.

IV

SARASVATĪ AS A CONCEPT IN THE PURANIC LITERATURE

Sarasvatī, originally a Vedic goddess of learning and speech, occupies a place of formidable importance also in the *Purāṇas* and the *Upapurāṇas*. According to the *Purāṇas*, Sarasvatī is primarily a river, as her name 'the watery' (*saras*) clearly denotes. She is said to have surpassed all other ancient rivers from which pure water used to flow from the mountains to the sea. It is by an almost imperceptible process that the river had transformed into a female deity and became the directress of ceremonies during the period depicted by the Puranic literature.

Out of the eighteen *Purāṇas* only ten contain references to Sarasvatī, either as a river or as a deity, or both. The Puranic myths and legends relating to Sarasvatī are, however, of confused character and it is extremely difficult to arrange them systematically for obtaining a clear idea regarding her. This is because the chapters of a particular *Purāṇa* were composed at different times and by distinct personages too. Nevertheless, here an attempt will be made to trace the development of conceptual and iconographic ideas about

Sarasvatī by comparing and contrasting information found in the various Puranic texts.

In the *Mārkaṇḍeya Puraṇa* (Ch. IV) there is a story that Maharṣi Jaimini while going through the Vindhyā forest was surprised to see that some birds were reading the *Vedas* distinctly and without any fault. This was possible owing to the fact that some Brāhmaṇas, being cursed, were born there as inferior creatures and had earned the favour of the goddess Sarasvatī who did not abandon them in spite of their condemned birth. In Chapter XXIII of the said *Purāṇa,* it is also stated that the Nāga king Aśvatara and his brother Kambala propitiated the resplendent goddess Jagaddhātrī Sarasvatī to gain proficiency in music. The goddess Jagaddhtārī Sarasvatī was praised as imperishable and supreme and as comprising everything. The three prosodial time (*mātrā-trayam*), the three worlds (*loka-trayam*), the *Vedas* (*devostrai-vidyām*), the three fires (*pāvaka-trayam*), the three lights (*trīni-jyotiṃṣī*); the three colours (*varnā*), the three lawbooks (*dharmāgamastathā*), the three qualities (*guṇastrayo*), the three sounds (*sabdās-trayo*), the three *āśramas,* the three times (*trayā-kālā*), the three states of life (*stathāvasthāḥ*), the *pitris,* the day, night and the rest are possessed by her. Nobody can explain her form and appearance by mouth, tongue, lips or other organs. Even Indra, the Vasus, Brahmā, the Moon and the Sun cannot explain her form. She is the supreme ruler of the Universe, and the power (*śaktis*) inherent in

gods, men and beasts, are manifested through her. All things visible and non-visible, permanent and perishable, gross and subtle, derive their perceptibility from her. The things that are in heaven, on the surface of the earth, in the sky or elsewhere are known and explained by her. Being so praised the goddess, who is also addressed as *Viṣṇujihvā Sarasvatī*, offered a boon to the Nāga king Aśvatara. As a result the king obtained the musical scales, the seven songs, the same number of modulations, the forty-nine musical tunes, the three octaves, the four kinds of quarter verse (*pada*), the three sorts of musical times, the three kinds of musical movements, the three pauses in music, the four-fold cymbals (*todya*) and whatever were contained within them and dependant thereon. This knowledge of music helped the Nāga king to please Śiva and thereby get back Madālasā. In chapter LXXII of the same *Purāṇa*, it is further stated that the Brāhmaṇas performed sacrifices to Sarasvatī in order to stimulate the power of speeeh.

The *Devī-māhātya* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* also contains an important and representative characterisation of the goddess Sarasvatī. The various *Devī-stutis* (*Brahmāṇī-stuti*, *Nārāyaṇī-stuti*, etc.) reveal in a striking manner some of the multifarious strands that largely contributed to the formation of a composite concept of the goddess. The Devī is invoked there under different names and it is difficult to determine if the names are synonymous or refer to distinct personages. But

the couplet of the *Nārāyani-stuti* states that the goddess will incarnate herself and kill the demons (*dānavas*), who are the enemies of the gods. The emanation of the Devi is known by such names as Mahākāli, Mahālakṣmī, Mahāvidyā, Mahāvāṇī, Bhāratī, Vāc, Brāhmā, Vedogarbhā and so on. Accordingly, it is assumed that the names are synonymous and designate a single divinity, viz. Sarasvatī.

The above legends of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* clearly show how Sarasvatī acquires the position of a supreme deity by taking epithets like Jagaddātrī, Mahālakṣmī, and Mahākālī, representing the energic principle (*śaktis*) of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, respectively. She is actually conceived as an embodiment of universal energy or *śakti* inherent in gods, men and beasts.

While glorifying Kurukṣetra and the adjoining places the *Vāmana Purāṇa* (Ch. XXXIII, Slokas 7-12) states that Sarasvatī is a great river that rises from the holy fig tree (*plakṣa vṛkṣa*) and passes through Kurukṣetra. The sacred land between the Sarasvatī and the Dṛṣadvatī is known as Brahmāvarta where the Vedic gods and sages had their early settlements. It is further stated that here on the bank of the Sarasvatī, the sage Mārkaṇḍeya worshipped Sarasvatī as a river goddess and explained the sacredness of her character. Several distinguished hermitages were set up along its bank ; Vedic hymns were chanted and sacrifices were performed there by the sages.

Mārkaṇḍeya, while seeking the welfare of the whole universe, praised the Devī Sarasvatī as the mother of all creations and the *Vedas*. All things, good or bad, all works that lead to salvation are within her. The eternal speech, knowledge, the fire and the earth are originated from her. The three worlds, the three *Vedas*, the three fires, the three colours, the three metals, the three times, the *pitris*, the *siddhis* and the rest are nothing but her creations.

It may be noted that in the above passages of the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, Markaṇḍeya praises Sarasvatī as a river goddess and speaks highly of her eternal power which is beyond creation and destruction. In a parallel language the Nāga king Aśvatara also praises Jagaddhātrī Sarasvatī in the *Mārkanḍeya Purāṇa* (Ch. XXIII). Thus it is assumable that the *Vāmana Purāṇa* follows the tradition of the Mārkaṇḍeya, and the goddess Sarasvatī and Jagaddhātrī, referred to in the said *Purāṇas*, may be identified as a single divinity. It may further be noted that the sage Mārkaṇḍeya plays a significant role in popularising the worship of the river goddess Sarasvatī, who till then was chiefly known as one of the supreme deities and associated with the Vedic gods.

In this connection, a question arises in respect of the chronological sequence of the *Vāmana Purāṇa*. According to R. C. Hazra, the *Vāmana Purāṇa* is a minor *Purāṇa* and was composed after the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. But from the conceptual

position of Sarasvatī in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, it seems that she is nearer to the conception as known from the *Vedas*. Again, in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which happens to be the earliest *Purāṇa*, as also in the *Vāmaṇa Purāṇa*, the presiding sage is Mārkaṇḍeya. Hence, notwithstanding its date of composition, we find that the *Vāmana Purāṇā* retains an older tradition.

The *Matsya Purāṇa*, however, presents a separate and distinct Sarasvatī. In its Chapters III and IV, Sarasvatī is narrated under different names like Śatarūpā, Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī and Brahmānī. Brahmā who created Śatarūpā out of his own body, became enamoured of her lovely appearance and looked at her amorously. But Śatarūpā in order to get rid of such a distressing situation turned to the right side from his gaze. Still Brahmā wished to look at her and a second head immediately appeared. As she passed to his left and his rear, in order to avoid his lustful glances, two other heads of the god successively appeared. At length she sprang to the sky, and following her, a fifth head of Brahmā was also formed. At last Brahmā espoused her and withdrew into a secluded spot. They spent there for one hundred divine years and at the expiration of that period Manu, who was called *Svayambhūva* as well as *Virajā*, was born. Brahmā thus becomes the principal power behind the creation of all gods and men and, as noted above, Śatarūpā or Gāyatrī was born from his body.

This myth of Brahmā's incestuousness towards his own creation may be traced to the *Ṛgveda* (X. 61.4) and the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (I. 7. 4. 1). Some of the *Purāṇas* take advantage of this vaguely allegorical but depreciatory myth and censures Brahmā for this shameful conduct, This is no doubt detrimental to the reputation of the Vedic god, and the prevalence of the legend could have lowered down his position as a supreme deity. But it would not be out of place to mention here that this is one of the necessary stages in the cosmic process and finds its near parallel in the Book of Genesis.[1]

In chapter LXVI of the *Matsya Purāṇa*, Matsya narrates to Manu the necessary formalities to be observed at the time of performing the *Sārasvata-vrata* and the results obtained thereon. The deity,[2] holding in her four hands a lyre (*Vīnā*), a rosary of beads (*akṣamālā*), a water vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*) and a manuscript (*pustaka*), is to be worshipped on every *Pañchamī* day, with white garlands (*śuklamālya*), a plant named *akṣata*, clarified butter (*ghṛta*), unboiled rice (*taṇḍula*), thickened milk (*kṣīra*), gold (*hiraṇya*) and sandal paste (*candana*). On that occasion milch cow, clothes and gold should be donated to the priests and the Brāhmaṇas. The goddess possesses all learnings of the *Vedas* and scriptures, dancing and musical power, fortune (*lakṣmī*), intelligence (*medhā*), the earth (*dharā*), nourishment (*puṣṭi*), brilliance (*gourī*), contentment (*tuṣṭi*), splendour (*prabhā*) and devotion (*mati*). The persons who worship

the deity with reverence obtain knowledge, riches, musical power and finally go to heaven.

In the *Matsya Purāṇa*, Sarasvatī is not mentioned as a supreme deity, she is rather important as a goddess of intelligence and wisdom. In this *Purāṇa* we witness a complete visual form of the goddess with characteristic iconographical features. Again, here we learn that originating from Brahmā, she becomes his consort and is endowed with the power of offering knowledge, riches and music to the worshippers. But in the Jagaddhātrī-Sarasvatī conception of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, the same goddess is said to be the originator of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, and possesses the attributes of creation by herself. Thus in the *Matsya Purāṇa*, Sarasvatī is found to have lost much of her position as a supreme deity that she enjoyed by sharing the concept of Vāc in the *Ṛgveda* (X. 125), and later on being worshipped as Jagaddhātrī-Sarasvatī.

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Ch. III Ślokas 13-16 and 24-32) raises Sarasvatī to an elevated position. In Chapter III of the said *Purāṇa* Mahādeva narrates to Nārada how the goddess Jagadambikā created Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara and espoused herself to them in the form of Sāvitrī, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī, and Umā, respectively. The goddess Jagadambikā is described as of a soft dark complexion with beautiful blossoming lotus like face, four arms, red eyes, exposed hair and developed and pointed breasts. She wears no cloth and sits on the back of a lion and shows fierce appearance.

The same goddess further manifests herself in five different froms, viz., Gaṅgā, Sāvitrī, Durgā, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. She appeared before Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśvara and advised them to take up the work of creation, preservation and destruction, herself being the consorts of them.

The Jagadambikā conception of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* appears to have been already explained in the *Ṛgveda* (X. 125), and the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Ch. XXIII), where the goddess is represented as Vāc and Jagaddhātrī-Sarasvatī respectively. While Vāc is associated with the Rudras, the Vasus, the Ādityas and the Viśvadevas and upholds Mitra and Varuṇa and both the Aśvins, Jagaddhātrī-Sarasvatī is endowed with the power of creation, preservation and destruction. It is further to note that in the *Bhāgvata Purāṇa*, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī are mentioned as the wives of Viṣṇu, the former representing fortune, and the latter knowledge and intellect.

The *Liṅga Purāṇa* is a manual of the Liṅga worshippers and inculcates the worship of the phallic emblem of Śiva. But in Chapter XVI of the said *Purāṇa* Sarasvati is mentioned as the daughter of Brahmā representing Viśvamātā. She is of white complexion and is bedecked with ornaments (*sarvābharaṇa-bhūṣitā*) including a white headdress (*uṣṇīṣa*). Again, Chapter XXIII, while praising the virtues of Gāyatri, Maheśvara narrates to Brahmā that he is Viśarūpa and Gāyatrī is *Viśvarūpā* and *Vedamātā*. She is also the daughter of Rudra (*Rudrasutā*) and of black

complexion (*kṛṣnangi-kṛṣna-lohitā* and *kṛṣna-rūpā*). The persons who get favour of Gāyatrī can go to *Viśvaloka*, a place of eternal peace and happiness. They are not subjected to the cycle of creation and destruction.

The *Varāha Purāṇa*, Chapter II, records a conversation between Nārada and Sāvitrī who is stated to be the mother of the *Vedas*. According to it, Nārada once went to *Śvetadvīpa* and saw a lady of exquisite beauty sitting by the side of a lake. When Nārada enquired of her whereabouts, she simply gazed at him. As a result Nārada immediately lost all the knowledge he had so far acquired. Being perplexed Nārada sought her protection and in the next moment saw on her three transient forms of Brahmā, Nārāyaṇa and Rudra. Within a few seconds these forms vanished and there remained the woman only. When Nārada insisted upon an explanation of the event, she replied that she was the mother of the *Vedas* and the *śāstras*. She asked Nārada to bathe in *Veda*-lake (*veda-saras*), and as a result, the latter was able to regain his previous knowledge.

The motive behind the story seems to be to connect the *Vedas* with the triad of gods, and thereby to attract the people to the study of the *Vedas* during the domination of the triads, and also to bestow more regard on Sāvitrī, also known as Gāyatrī and Sarasvatī.

In a single Śloka of the *Agni Purāṇa* (Ch. L, 16). Sarasvatī is described as a deity having book

(*pustaka*), rosary (*akṣamālā*) and lyre (*vīṇā*) in her hands (*pustakākṣa-mālikā-hastā vīṇā-hastā Sarasvatī*). These attributes of the deity show that her iconic concept took a definite shape at the time of the composition of the *Agni Purāṇa.*

In the *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa* of the *Padma Purāṇa* (Ch. XVI Śloka 306-12) Rudradeva praised Gāyatrī as the mother of the *Vedas* in a striking manner and declared her also as a *durgā-taraṇī* and *Vāṇī saptavidhā.* She is the personification of all scriptures, ballads, alphabets and rules of conduct. The goddess is white complexioned having a face of moon-like beauty. Her hands—soft and large—hold horn of a deer and a white lotus. She wears white dress, red scarf and ornaments of different varieties. In Chapter CCXXI, 111-250, of the said *Purāṇa,* it is also stated that at Puṣkara, the Sarasvatī was of five streams, viz., Suprabhā, Kāñcana, Prācī, Nandā and Viśālakā and the places around the banks of the river were regarded as the places of pilgrimages. The places were so sacred that the persons who would bathe in the waters of the Sarasvatī would get the result of *aśvamedha* sacrifice. It is further stated that Viṣṇu along with other gods asked Sarasvatī to carry fire (*anala*) from Puṣkara and to drop it into the sea (*lavana-sāgara*). Sarasvatī advised the gods to seek permission from Brahmā, her father, in that respect, as she was unmarried and was unable to move anywhere without her father's consent. Accordingly, the gods went to Brahmā and requested

him to advise Sarasvatī to do so, Thereafter, Brahmā took his daughter on his lap and told her tenderly to honour the request of the gods. Sarasvatī wept bitterly as she was unwilling to leave Puṣkara. But ultimately she agreed to proceed on her ways. She appeared before the gods with her white dress ; she was decorated with white sandal paste and was sitting on a lotus. The gods praised her highly at that auspicious moment. She took leave of her associates, viz. Gāyitrī, Sāvitrī, Gaṅgā and Yamunā, and then changing herself from a river form to that of a lady went to the hermitage of sage Utaṅka. Therafter she climbed up a *plakṣa* tree before the gods, and therefrom started again to flow as a river. It is to be noted that during the historical period several attractive pilgrimages had grown up along the courses on which the river had passed through.

The underlying truth of this myth appears to be that the Sarasvatī as a river originated from the mountain and started flowing. But she met the desert at Puṣkara, identified with the famous pilgrimage of that name near Ajmere. As the desert was extending day by day, she was afraid that her waters would not stop it, rather she would be lost in the sands. This allegorical legend refers to the fact that at the time of composing of the *Padma Purāṇa* Sarasvatī was already lost in the desert.

In an interesting myth found in the *Skanda Purāṇa* we find how Gāyatrī became the second

wife of Brahmā. There Sāvitrī, who is usually identified with Sarasvatī, is regarded as his first wife. Siva tells Pārvatī that Sāvitrī forsook Brahmā and he in consequence expoused Gāyatrī. Brahmā decided to perform a great sacrifice and for that purpose he and his wife Sāvitrī along with other gods, goddesses and the sages repaired to Puṣkara. When all the preparations were made with due rites and ceremonies for performing the sacrifice, Sāvitrī, detained by some household affairs, was not in attendance. A priest was immediately advised to call her. But she replied that she had not yet completed her dress, nor arranged several affairs. Lakṣmī, Bhavāni and Gaṅgā and Svahā and Indrāṇī and the wives of the gods and the sages had not yet arrived, and, therefore, she could not enter the assembly alone. The priest returned to the place of sacrifice and reported to Brahmā that Sāvitrī was engaged elsewhere and would not come at that moment. But without a wife no advantage could be derived by performing a sacrifice. So Brahmā advised Indra to bring a wife from where-ever he could find one. Indra proceeded accordingly and, as he was passing hastily alone, he saw a milkmaid, who was young, beautiful and ofsmiling countenance, and was carrying a jar of butter. Indra seized her and brought to the assembly. Then Brahmā told that he would espouse the milkmaid named Gāyatrī and she would be regarded as the mother of the *Vedas*. Thus Brahmā was united with Gāyatrī, who was led into the

bower of the bride, arrayed in silken garments and adorned with costliest ornaments.

At that time Sāvitrī, accompanied by the wives of Viṣṇu, Rudra and other gods, came to the place of sacrifice. Seeing the milkmaid in the bride's bower, and the priest engaged in the performance of the sacred rites, Sāvitrī became furious and asked Brahmā how he had committed such a sinful act by rejecting his wedded wife. She also blamed him by saying that it was by the influence of love that he had done such a sinful act in spite of the fact that he was the father of the gods and the holy sages. This morally wrong act done by him would excite derision of the three worlds. She also told that she would not be able to show her face to others and call herself a wife as she was deserted by her husband. Then Brahmā replied that the priests had informed that the time for sacrifice was passing away and it could not be profitably performed unless his wife was present and Indra having brought Gāyatrī, Viṣṇu and Rudra gave her in marriage to him. He then requested Sāvitrī to forgive that act of him and he would never again offend her.

On hearing this Sāvitrī cursed Brahmā and other gods and goddesses. Thereafter Brahmā would never be worshipped in temples and sacred places, except one day in each year. And Indra, since he had brought that milkmaid to Brahmā, would be bound in chains by his enemies, and confined in a strange country ; and his city and station should

be occupied by his enemies. Addressing Viṣṇu she said, since he arranged the marriage of the milk-maid with Brahmā, he, in consequence of Bhṛgu's curse, would be born amongst men and should endure agony of having his wife ravished by his enemy and would wander as an humble keeper of cattle. Rudra also, by curse of the holy sages, would be deprived of his manhood. Sāvitrī then cursed Agni, who would henceforth be devourer of all things, both clean and unclean. The priest and the Brāhmaṇas were so cursed that they would perform sacrifices solely for the desire of obtaining the usual gifts, and from covetousness alone they should attend temples and holy places; they should be satisfied with the food of others and dissatisfied with that of their own houses and in quest of riches they should unduly perform the holy rites and ceremonies. Having pronounced these curses, Sāvitrī left the assembly, and was accompanied for a short distance by Lakṣmī and other goddesses, when they all declared their intention of returning. On hearing this, Sāvitrī was incensed and thus addressed Lakṣmī, 'Since you would forsake me, you would never remain stationary in one place, and would always abide with the vile, the inconsistent, the contemptible, the sinful, the cruel, the foolish and the barbarian. When Indra would incur the guilt of Brahmanicide by slaying Tvaṣṭṛ's son, Nahuṣa would acquire his kingdom and would ask Indrāṇī to wait upon him; otherwise, he would slay all the gods. On

learning his wishes Indrānī would remain in his own house immersed in grief and borne down by the weight of the curse. Sāvitrī then cursed the wives of all the gods collectively. As a result, they would all remain barren and would fail to enjoy the pleasure of having children. Then Viṣṇu tried to appease her but could not.

After Sāvitrī's angry departure from the assembly, Gāyatrī modified the curses that had been pronounced. She promised all kinds of blessing, including final absorption of all the worshippers of Brahmā into her. Though Indra would be bound, his son would release him ; though Viṣṇu would lose his wife, he should regain her. Though Rudra would be deprived of his manhood, the Liṅga as his representative should be universally worshipped. Men would make gifts to the Brāhmaṇas, because they revered them as gods. And though goddesses could not have children of their own, this would not cause them regret. But the quarrel between Brahmā and Sāvitrī had a happy termination. Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī induced Sāvitrī to re-enter the assembly where Gāyatrī threw herself at her feet and sought her guidance and advice. Sāvitrī raised her and embracing her said, 'A wife ought to obey the wishes and orders of her husband ; therefore, let us both be attached to Brahmā. Gāyatrī then said, 'So be it, I will always obey your orders and esteem your friendship as precious as my life.'

The myth, narrated above, is apparently of

signal importance from the viewpoint of recording some radical changes in the post-vedic religious life in India. Tbe *Skanda Purāṇa* appears to have attempted to reconcile some of these changes noticed in the mode of worship of the followers of Brahmanical system. Moreover, the myth helps us to fix up the phase of this change over. The end of Brahmā and Indra's supremacy marks the beginning of the advent of Puranic cults, whose presiding deities were Viṣṇu and Śiva. Again, from the curse of Sāvitrī we find the mythical justification of Rāma's agony caused by the abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa and also Kṛṣṇa's associations with the cowherds, for both Rāma and Kṛṣṇa were the incarnations of Viṣṇu. Similarly, an attempt has been made to provide a background story of the popularisation of Liṅga worship. Of course, the religious transformation, recorded in the *Skanda Purāṇa,* took place much earlier than the period of its composition.

In Chapter XLI of the *Maheśvara-khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa* it is stated that while the sage Kaśyapa was bathing in the holy pilgrimage of Sarasvatī. Gāyatrī and Sarasvatī appeared before him and introduced themselves as the two wives of Brahmā. Kaśyapa praised them as the mother of the *Vedas* and the originators of all creations. Thereafter, Kaśyapa received a boon from the goddesses.

In Chapter XLVI of the *Nāgara-khaṇḍa* of the *Skanda Purāṇa,* it is further stated that Vaśiṣṭha

advised the legendary king Balabardhana to perform sacrifice at the pilgrimage of Sarasvatī in order to regain the power of speech of Ambubīci, his only son. After meditation at the hermitage the king made an earthen idol of the goddess and worshipped her. The goddess had four arms having lotus (*padma*), rosary (*akṣamālā*), water vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*) and manuscript (*pustaka*). She was placed on a holy stone and was praised highly of her qualities. Elsewhere, in Chapter CLXXII, of the said *Purāṇa*, it is recorded that in order to kill Vaśiṣṭha, Viśvāmitra once asked Sarasvatī, the river goddess, to bring Vaśiṣṭha to him by her strong current, when the great sage would be bathing in her holy waters. But Sarasvatī refused to do so. As a result, by the curse of Viśvāmitra, Sarasvatī became a blood-carrying stream. But ultimately by the activities of Vaśiṣṭha, she got rid of the curse and again became a stream of holy waters.

By comparing and contrasting the various myth associated with Sarasvatī the river and the goddess of the same name found in the *Sknnda Purāṇa*, it appears that Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī and Sarasvatī are the names of Brahmā's consort in her three different evolutionary phases, and the change of name has been reconciled, by the anecdotes preserved in the *Skanda Purāṇa*. It is significant to note that the *Skanda Purāṇa* also refers to an earthen image of the deity along with her iconic attributes.

The story associating Sarasvatī with Viṣṇu is of

more recent origin. It is indeed found in fully developed form only in the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa.* (*Prakṛti-khaṇḍa,* Ch-IV. Ślokas 10-12 and 19-29) a work avowedly devoted to the cult of Kṛṣṇa. Here the older traditions regarding the origin of Sarasvatī and her relationship with Brahmā is altogether passed over and a novel origin is fabricated for her. Kṛṣṇa, according to this *Purāṇa,* is the lord of the Universe. Once he felt an inclination to create and thus sprang from him Rādhā, his female counterpart. Their union produced the mundane egg, which Rādhā threw into the mundane waters. Kṛṣṇa was incensed at this unmotherly conduct of Rādhā and cursed her as well as other gddesses, who would be her parts and would proceed from her with ever-lasting youth and barrenness. At this stage, suddenly from the lip of Rādhā sprang forth a lovely daughter of white complexion wearing yellow dresses, bedecked with jewels and holding a Vīṇā and a book in her hands, the presiding deity of all the scriptures (*sāstras*). Rādhā again parted herself into two and her left half was transformed into Kamalā or Lakṣmī. At this, Kṛṣṇa also parted into two and produced the fourarmed Viṣṇu from the left half of his body. Kṛṣṇa gave Sarasvatī and Kamalā to Viṣṇu as his wives.

Form Chapter VI of the said *Purāṇa,* it further appears that Viṣṇu had obtained another wife, Gaṅgā by name, in the meantime. One day Gaṅgā was looking wistfully at her lord and Viṣṇu was

reciprocating the glances. This was too much for the short-tempered Sarasvatī who began to accuse Viṣṇu of partiality. Viṣṇu, in order to give Sarasvatī time to recover from her temper, left the place ; but this only served to incense Sarasvatī the more. She advanced threatingly to Gaṅgā, when Lakṣmī intervened. Exasperated at the intervention Sarasvatī cursed Lakṣmī with transformation into a tree and a river. Lakṣmī was holding Sarasvatī by force. The curse made her full of grief, but she neither cursed her in return nor let Sarasvatī go. Then Gaṅgā fired up and cursed Sarasvatī with transformation into a river. Sarasvatī who had not yet cooled down, returned the same curse to Gaṅgā.

At this stage Viṣṇu returned and learnt what had happened. He then divorced Sarasvati and Gaṇgā and decreed that only Lakṣmī should remain with him, part of her energy descending to the earth to fulfil the curses of Sarasvatī. She should thus be born as the daughter of a king, obtain Viṣṇu as her lover and then be transformed into the sacred *tulasī* plant. As a river, she would be known as Padmāvatī or the Padmā and would be as sacred as the Gaṅgā. Sarasvatī was given over to Brahmā and Gaṅgā to Śiva. At the intervention of Lakṣmī, however, Viṣṇu relented so far as to permit Sarasvatī and Gaṅgā to remain with him in part, while the rest of their energy would go to fulfil the curses and to attend on their new husbands.

It is further stated in the said *Purāṇa* (Ch. IV, 11) that goddess Sarasvati would be worshipped on the *Śukla Pañcamī* or *Jñāna Pañcamī* day, henceforth known as *Śrī Pañcamī* day in the month of *Māgha*. But the day of *Śrī Pañcamī* was originally a day in which Lakṣmī, the goddess of fortune was worshipped. The *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa* had finally solved this controversy by stating that goddess Sarasvatī would be worshipped on that day along with Lakṣmī and a vow (*vrata*) continuing for six years should be taken up in favour of Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth and fortune.

The Chapters between CCVII and CCVIII of the *Bhaviṣyottara Purāṇa*, which is an *Upa-purāṇa*, describe the various festivals of vows and offerings which are to be observed on different lunar days from *pratipad* and in which, various deities like Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Durgā, Ganeśa, Sarasvatī and other gods and goddesses are to be worshipped. It is to note that these religious vows would be necessary for attaining happiness, power, peace, prosperity and getting rid of sufferings in hell.

In Chapter XVI of the *Devī Purāṇa* the goddess (*Devī*) was mentioned under different names like Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī, Satī, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Ambikā and so on. Again in Chapter XXXIX of the said *Purāṇa* the name of Sarasvati-taṭa, a holy place in which the Devī was worshipped in different forms by different gods, sages and kings, has been mentioned.

Almost all the chapters of the *Devī-bhāgavata*,

another important *Upa-purāṇa,* have been taken from the *Prakṛti-khaṇḍa* of the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa.* The chapters between II and XV of the said *Upa-purāṇa* are stored with ample information relating to the origin of Sarasvatī, the method of worshipping the goddess, the quarrel among Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Gaṅga and so on. They also allude to the origin of Sarasvatī from the mouth of Rādhā ; but here Sarasvatī desires to unite with Kṛṣṇa instead of Viṣṇu as stated in the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa.* Again, it was Kṛṣṇa who instructed Sarasvatī to go to Nārāyaṇa for the purpose of fulfilling her desires. From the *Devī-bhāgavata Purāṇa* we get a clear description of the method of worshipping the deity on the *Māgha Śukla-pañcamī.* Different articles likes *tila, ladduka,* sacred food (*haviṣyānna*) the wood-apple (*srīphala*) the jujube fruit (*badarī-phala*) and others should be offered to the deity with the chanting of the eight-syllabled mantra, *'Śrīm hrim sarasvatvai svāhā'* and meditation (*dhyāna*) on Sarasvatī as *'śuklāvarṇā' 'vīuā-pustaka-dhārinī'* and so on. It is said that the worship of Sarasvatī must be preceded by that of Ganeśa performed according to the Vedic or the Tantric system. Further, the description of *Sarasvatī-kavaca* and the eulogy of Sarasvatī by Yajñavalkya who lost his learning due to the curse of his religious preceptor (*Guru*) are also narrated here. It also retells the story of the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* relating to the quarrel amongst Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Gaṅgā who were transformed into

rivers in the names of the Padmā, the Sarasvatī and the Gaṅgā and finally became consorts of Viṣṇu, Brahmā, and Śiva, respectively. In Chapter XXX, the convention of worshipping Sarasvatī on *Māgha Śuklapañcamī* along with other deities is also mentioned. In *Kālikā Purāṇa* (Ch. XVIII) the names of Sāvitrī, Gāyatrī, Sarasvatī, Drupadā and Bahulā who gave instructions on chastity are also mentioned in connection with the story of Vaśiṣṭha's marriage with Arundhatī. The *Mahābhāgavata Purāṇa* (Ch. III) describes the origin of the universe as well as of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Pṛthivī, Durgā, Sāvitrī, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. It also narrates (Chapters LXIX-LXX) how Gaṅgā had divided herself into seven streams by following the sound of seven conch-shells blown by seven sages. She then rushed towards the southeast and met the Yamunā and Sarasvatī at Prayāga.

The *Bṛhad-dharma Purāṇa* gives an elaborate description of the names of different holy places. In Chapter VI and XIII, of the *Pūrva-khaṇḍa* of the said *Purāṇa*, the names of Prayāga where Yamunā and Sarasvatī fell into the Gaṅgā, Trivenī, where the Yamunā and Sarasvatī are separated from the Gaṅgā, and Brahma-tīrtha where the Sarasvatī flows towards the east are incidentally mentioned. It also speaks of the method of worshipping Sarasvatī (Ch. XV). In Chapter XXV Brahmā's first creation of the words (Vācaḥ), letters and fiftysix languages and his subsequent authorship of grammatical works, philosophical treatises, *Purāṇas*, etc.,

are related in details. Sarasvatī has been described there as a goddess richly adorned with various kinds of ornaments and to have a white complexion, three eyes, four hands having nectar (*sudhā*), book (*vidyā*), hand-pose (*mudrā*) and rosary (*akṣa-guṇa*) in them. Brahmā further advised Sarasvatī to live in his four mouths as well as in those of poets. Sarasvatī thereafter took her residence in the mouth of Vālmīki as soon as the latter was over-powered with grief at the sight of the sad plight of a female bird whose male mate was killed by a fowler. Vālmīki cursed the fowler by uttering a *śloka* and finally obtained the power of composing the epic called the *Rāmāyaṇa* from Sarasvatī. Some other references to Sarasvatī are also found in this *Purāṇa*. For example, in Chapter I of the *Madhya Khaṇḍa* of the said *Purāṇa*. Prakriti assured Brahmā and Viṣṇu that she would be born as Gaṅgā, Durgā, Sāvitrī, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. According to Chapter XIV, after Śiva had gone to Kailāśa with Gaṅgā on his head, Nārada went to Vaikuṇṭha and saw Nārāyaṇa with Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī at his sides. In Chapter XX, it is narrated that at the time of birth of Gajānana, Sarasvatī and Brahmā offered him a pen and rosary of beads (*japa-mālā*), respectively. In Chapter XIX, there is a vivid description of the state of religion and society in the Kali age. There would be serious disagreements among the traditions of the *Purāṇas* as well as among the different systems of philosophy and Sarasvatī would be weeping out of agony. In

order to bring peace to Sarasvatī, Śiva and Viṣṇu would incarnate somewhere on the earth in families having the surname Ācārya. Viṣṇu being named as Śaṅkara would incarnate as an Ācārya and Sarasvatī would be his wife.

Notes and References

1. The ***Book of Genesis*** states that the creation of man in the divine 'image and likeness' was followed by the primordial sabbath on the seventh day. Man (Adam) was created out of dust and made into a living thing by God blowing the breath of life into him. Woman (Eve) was created out of his own rib and put into a paradisal garden (Eden) by God, especially created for them to till and to tend and to sustain life. ***Encyclopaedia Britannica***, 15th Edn., vol. 2. 1943-1973, p. 899.
2. *Matsya Purāṇa*, Ch. LXVI, verse 10.

IV

ICONOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FROM TEXTS

Various texts describe different iconic types of Sarasvatī. They refer to her two-armed and four-armed forms with wide variety in emblems and vehicles. She is either sitting or standing as an independent goddess or is associated with Brahmā both as his daughter and as his wife, and at other times with Viṣṇu as Puṣṭi, one of his consorts. However, all texts are normally unanimous in representing her as a white-coloured deity, clearly indicating her purity.

I. *The Purāṇas* :

The *Purāṇas* contain the most important source materials relating to the iconographic features of Sarasvatī. She is referred to in as many as ten *Purāṇas*, but her iconographic features are noted only in the following texts :

(*a*) *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* : In the *Devī-māhātya* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* it is mentioned that the Mahā-Sarasvatī holds an *ankuśa* (elephant-goad) in one of her hands. These objects and attributes indicate her close association with Śiva.

(*b*) *Matsya Purāṇa* : In the *Matsya Purāṇa*

Sarasvatī or Gāyatrī is a deity holding in her four hands a lyre (*vīṇā*) a rosary (*akṣamālā*), a water vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*) and a manuscript (*pustaka*). It is enjoined that she would be worshipped with white garlands and sandal-paste (*śuklamālyānulepanai*) as well as white clothes (*śukla-vastrāṇi*).

(c) Bhāgavata Purāṇa: The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*[2] describes Sarasvatī as a consort of Viṣṇu. She sits on the back of a lion. She possesses four arms, red eyes, exposed hair, and developed and pointed breasts. She wears no garment and her appearance is fierce.

(*d*) *Liṅga Purāṇa*: According to the *Liṅga Purāṇa*,[3] Gāyatrī, the daughter of Brahmā, holds garlands and clothes in her two hands. She has white headdress and is of white appearance.

(*e*) *Padma Purāṇa*: In the Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa of the *Padma Purāṇa* Gāyatrī,[4] the mother of the *Vedas*, is described as a white-complexioned deity with a beautiful moon-like face. Her hands, soft and large, hold the horns of a deer and a white lotus. She wears a white lower garment, a red-coloured upper-garment and ornaments of different varieties. She sits on a white lotus.

(f) Agni Purāṇa: The *Agni Purāṇa*[5] gives rosary (*akṣamālā*), book (*pustaka*), and lyre (*vīṇā*) in the hands of Sarasvatī. It is noteworthy that in her usual representation, prevalent particularly in Eastern India, Sarasvatī holds a *vīṇā* with her two front hands and tunes the cords of the instrument, while rosary and book in her back hands.

(g) *Skanda Purāṇa* : In the Nāgarakhaṇḍa of the *Skanda Purāṇa*,[6] it is stated that king Baladeva made an earthen idol of Sarasvatī and worshipped her with garlands and perfumes. She possesses four hands having lotus and *akṣamālā* in the two right hands, while *kamaṇḍalu* and *pustaka* in the left hands. She sits on a holy stone. It is also stated in the said *Purāṇa* that Sarasvatī possesses *jaṭāmukuṭa* with crescent moon over the head. Her neck is of blue colour and she has three eyes.

(*h*) *Bṛhad-dharma Purāṇa* : In the *Bṛhad-dharma Purāṇa*,[7] which is an *Upa-purāṇa*, Sarasvatī is described as a goddess richly adorned with various kinds of ornaments. She holds in her four hands : nectar (*sudhābhāṇḍa*), book (*vidyā*) hand-pose (*mudrā*) and rosary (*akṣamālā*). She is three-eyed (*trinetrā*). Her complexion is white.

From the above descriptions of Sarasvatī collected from the various sections of the *Purāṇas*, it is clear that there was no unanimity as regards number of hands Sarasvatī is supposed to have. In the *Liṅga* and the *Padma Purāṇas* she is described as with two hands, whereas in the *Matsya, Bhāgavata, Agni, Skanda* and *Bṛhad-dharma Purāṇas* she is portrayed as having four hands. Most of the texts refer to the four armed Sarasvatī with book (*pustaka*) and rosary (*akṣamālā*) in her two hands, but they differ with regard to the objects in her remaining two hands. The usual objects are, however, lyre (*viṇā*), white lotus (*puṇḍarika*) and

water-vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*), though horn of a deer is also mentioned.[8]

II. *The Tantras* :

The *Tantrasāra* prescribes six *dhyānas* of Sarasvatī, an analysis of which will help in determining the iconographic characteristics of the deity. She is white-complexioned (*śvetavarṇā*), smeared with white sandal-paste (*śveta-candana-carccitā*) and decked with garlands and clothes (*subhram svaccha-vilepamālya-vasanam sitāṁgśu-khanḍojjvalam*). She sits on a white lotus (*śveta-kamalāsīnā*) or on a swan (*haṁsārūḍhā*). She wears a head dress containing a young moon (*tarunenduvaddha-mukuṭā*) and is slightly drooping forward for the weight of her developed breasts (*kuca-vārā-klāntā*). In one of the *dhyānas* she holds a pen and a book (*nija-kara-kamalodya lekhanī pustakaśrī*), while in other cases she holds a lotus, (*padma*), rosary (*akṣamālā*), water vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*) and book (*pustaka*) in her four hands. Again, in two *dhyānas* she is described as having three eyes (*trinayanā*) and as bestower of fortune, wealth and knowledge.

The *'Sāradātilakatantra,*[9] a Tantric text, contains a *dhyāna* of Sarasvatī and information on her iconic features, the nature and mode of her worship and the conduct of the worshipper. She is Sāradā, snow-white, three-eyed and with crescent moon on her forehead. She possesses large and pointed breasts. She carries *jnānamudrā*, a rosary (*akṣamālā*),

a jar full of nectar (*sudhābhāṇḍa*), a book (*pustaka*) in her four hands. The qualities and attributes noted in the *Tantra* indicate her close association with Śiva.

III. The Śilpa Texts :

(*a*) The *Bṛhad-saṁhitā*[10] represents Sarasvatī as a mighty river, flowing along with other mighty streams which disappears in the western country. While describing the Royal Ablution (*puṣya-snānam*), the sanctity associated with the river has been alluded to with the following expression :

"May the gods bathe you, and the ancient Siddhas, Brahmaṇ, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Sanchayas, groups of Maruts, the Sun, Vasus, the great celestial physicians, Aditi, the mother of the gods, Svāhā, Siddhi Sarasvatī······may these bathe you."

(*b*) The *Aṁśumad-bhedāgama* and the *Pūrvakāraṇāgāma*, the two *Āgāma* texts, have been referred to by T. A. Gopinath Rao[11] as containing description of Sarasvatī. According to the said texts, Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, is seated upon a white lotus, is of white complexion and is draped in white clothes. She has four hands. In one of the right hands she holds *akṣamālā* and other right hand is in the pose called *vyākhyāna-mudrā*, and in the left hands she carries a book and white lotus, respectively. She wears a *yajñopavita* on her person and has the *jaṭāmukuṭa* on the head. Besides, she is decked with other ornaments including

pearl necklace, ear-rings, armlets, bangles, bracelets and so on. It is further stated that the *kuṇḍalas* of Sarasvatī should be made of rubies, while the *Pūrvakāraṇāgama* prescribes for her ear-rings of pearl (*muktākuṇḍala-maṇḍitā*).

(*c*) The *Viṣṇu-dharmottara-Purāṇa*[12] gives a detailed description of Sarasvatī. She has a face resembling the moon and stands evenly on her feet (*samapāda pratiṣtha*). She has four hands. In her right hands she holds a *pustaka* and an *akṣamālā* and in her left *vaiṇāvī* and *kamaṇḍalu*. She is, as usual, richly decorated with ornaments.

In explaining the significance of different iconic traits of the goddess the *Viṣṇu-dharmottara* states that the four hands represent the four *Vedas* and the book (*pustaka*) represents all *sāstras*. *Kamaṇḍalu* in her hand is supposed to contain the immortal essence of all the *sāstras* and the rosary symbolises time (*kāla*). The *vaiṇāvi* is achievement (*siddhi*). Her face represents Sāvitrī and Gāyatrī, while her eyes represent the sun and the moon.

Again, in verse 25 of Ch. 73 of the said text, the goddess is further referred to. The only new information found here is that the hand carrying the *vaiṇāvi* carries a *triśūla* instead.

(*d*) The *Aparājitapṛcchā*,[13] stating the nature of the Sarasvatī's advocation, states that the goddess should be worshipped in temples or in a house. The deity, seated in *padmāsana*, carries *akṣamālā*, *vīnā*, *pustaka* and *kamaṇḍalu* in her four arms. She is a snow-white deity in white garments, blue-necked

(*nilakaṇṭi*) and variously known as Mahāvidyā, Mahāvāṇī, Bhāratī and Sarasvatī.

(*e*) The *Śilparatna*,[14] a Śilpa text of the 16th century, describes a ten-armed Sarasvatī holding lyre (*vīṇā*), disc (*cakra*), conch-shell (*śaṅkha*), bowl (*kapāla*), noose (*pāśa*), axe (*paraśu*), a vessel containing nectar (*sudhā-kumbha*), book (*veda*), rosary (*akṣamālā*), and lotus (*padma*). She has three eyes (*tri-nayanā*). The text also gives a description of Vāgīśvarī who is of three eyes. She a goddess of moon-like beauty, holds pen and book in her two hands and wears a headdress.

(*f*) The *Rūpamaṇḍana*[15] also gives a description of Sarasvatī. According to this text, the deity holds *akṣamālā, pustaka, kamaṇḍalu* and *vīṇā* in her four hands. She has earrings (*kuṇḍala*) in her ears and headdress (*mukuṭa*) on her head. She sits on a swan.

It, thus, appears that in the *Śilpa* texts Sarasvatī is usually described as (i) white-coloured, dressed in white garment and decked with ornaments, (ii) two or four-armėd, (iii) holding in her hands any of the objects from lyre (*vīṇā*), book (*pustaka*), rosary (*akṣamālā*), water-vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*), pen (*lekhanī*), white lotus (*puṇḍarīka*), etc., and (iv) sitting either on a swan, lion or lotus. She is also mentioned as ten-haned, blue-necked and three-eyed.

Notes and References

1. ***Matsya Purāṇa***, **Ch. LXVI, verse 10.**
2. ***Bhāgavata Purāṇa***, **Ch. III, verse 16.**

3. *Liṅga Purāṇa*, Ch. XXIII, verse 31.
4. *Padma Purāṇa : Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, Ch. XVI, verses 306-309.
5. *Agni Purāṇa*, Ch. XX, verse 16.
6. *Skanda Purāṇa, Nagarakhaṇḍa*, Ch. XLIX, verses 18-20.
7. *Bṛhad-dharma Purāṇa*, Ch. VI, verses 39-40.
8. The horn of a deer (enāśṛṅga) being an attribute in the hand of Sarasvatī is found only once in the Puranic texts (*Padma Purāṇa*), *Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*, v. 307, but there is hardly any sculptural representation of the object in any of the hands of the goddess.
9. *Sāradātilakatantra*, Ch. VI, verses, 34-36 & 113-123.
10. *Bṛhat-Saṁhitā, Puṣya-snānām*, Ch. XLVII, verse 56.
11. T. A. Gopinath Rao, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 377-78.
12. *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, Ch. LXVI.
13. *Aparājitapṛcchā*, Ch. 230.
14. *Śilparatna*, Ch. XXIV, verses 4 & 8.
15. *Rūpamaṇḍana*, Ch. V, verses 61-63.

V

ICONOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF ACTUAL IMAGES

In the preceding chapters, the conceptual development of Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, music and fine arts, has been traced on the basis of several evidences. It is also shown how the river Sarasvatī, on the banks of which the Vedic lore and learning had flourished in ancient times, seems to have played a significant part in the development of the concept of Sarasvatī as a deity. It has further been revealed that Sarasvatī as a deity of learning and wisdom was held in high esteem by the Hindus, the Jains and the Buddhists. In this chapter an attempt will be made to find out the iconographic features of the deity by comparing and contrasting information obtained from canonical texts of the Brahmanical tradition with those of the icons found in different parts of the country. In marking out the iconographic features the images would be arranged according to their *vāhanas*, *āyudhas* and *āsanas* in which the deity is sitting or standing. They will also be treated chronologically so that a clear idea about the peculiar iconic features of the images belonging to different ages can be formed.

Ordinarily Sarasvatī is represented sitting on a

lotus with one leg pendent, a posture known as *lalitāsana*. She is white-complexioned, dressed in white garments and decked with various ornaments. She is holding a lyre (*vīṇā*), manuscript (*pustaka*) rosary (*akṣamālā*), water-vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*), lotus (*padma*) in her two or four hands, and is provided with a swan, a peacock, a ram or even a lion as her vehicle. Her white complexion and white garments suggest her purity. The manuscript and the musical instrument in her hands are indicative of her close connection with learning and fine arts. The rosary and the water-vessel in the hands of the deity imply the great truth that learning cannot flourish without the combination of devotion, meditation and sacrifice. Again, rosary, water-vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*) and swan evidently point to her relation with Brahmā. The association of the goddess with a peacock relates her to the river Sarasvatī, on the banks of which the bird is known to have roosted in abundance in ancient times. Sarasvatī is also mentioned as ten-handed, blue-necked, three-eyed and having lion as her vehicle. This is suggestive of her *Śakti* aspect and her connection with Śiva. Similarly, ram as her vehicle associates her with Agni.

The handsome female figure on the railing pillar of Bharhut (Pl. I), carved in the 2nd century B. C., is usually regarded as the earliest known representation of the goddess of learning, The figure is much mutilated and does not bear the descriptive level generally found with the reliefs at Bharhut. However, enough remains to enlighten us as to its

nature. The goddess is standing in a graceful frontal pose on a large full-blown lotus. She plays on a seven-stringed *vīṇā* or large harp placed in front across her body. She is of youthful appearance and wears ornaments of usual Bharhut type. J. N. Banerjea[1] regards the figure as an early prototype of the goddess Sarasvatī, and Barua[2] finds in it an early iconic form of the deity.

The image of Sarasvatī from Ghaṇṭasāla[3] (Andhra State) (Pl. II), is the earliest known representation of the goddess in south India. The goddess stands in a strict *samapāda* posture having four hands : the upper right holds a lotus-bud and the lower one is placed over the head of a swan ; the upper left holds a manuscript and the lower is hanging. From the strict frontality noticed in this image, it seems to be a contemporary of the above noted Bharhut figure (Pl. I) which belongs to the 2nd century B. C. The closed meditative eyes, terraced *jāṭamukuṭa* and the swan as the vehicle of the goddess, however, indicative of her iconic development of a slightly later date.

One of the earliest figures of Sarasvatī with a manuscript as her emblem was discovered from Kaṅkāliṭīlā, near Mathura (Pl. III).[4] The goddess is shown squatting on a plain rectangular pedestal and holding a manuscript in her left hand. The upper portion of the image is lost together with the right hand which was raised and probably showed *vyākhyānamudrā* or a pen. The figure, clothed in stiffly executed drapery, has two attendants, one

standing on each side, with hairs dressed in rolls. The attendant on the right wears a tunic and holds a jar. Whereas his counterpart on the left shows clasped hands in adoration. The pitcher in the hands of the attendant on the right probably symbolizes the receptacle of knowledge (*jñāna-bhāṇḍa)* of which she is the presiding deity.[5] The figure, found from a Jaina site, bears inscriptional evidence to show it conclusively as a Jaina version of the goddess Sarasvatī. The Brāhmī inscription of the Kuṣāṇa period on the pedestal records the installation of the image by a Jaina devotee, Smith Gova, son of Siha, at the instance of the preacher Āryadeva in the year 54 (or 44 as suggested by Smith),[6] i. e. 132 or 122 A.D. The image probably belonged to the Śvetāmbara sect.

D. B. Disalkar[7] has noticed two other Kuṣāṇa sculptures belonging to the Mathura Museum as the figures of Sarasvatī with a peafowl as her vehicle. Unfortunately, the upper portion of the sculptures are severely mutilated. Thus, in our opinion, the presence of peafowl on the pedastal alone is not a sufficient proof for the identification of the figures as Sarasvatī.

Sarasvatī (Pl. IV) is also represented on the reverse of the *Rājalīlā* type of coins of Samācāradeva (C. 550-575 A. D.), a predecessor of Śaśāṅka of Gauḍa. Here she stands in *tribhaṅga* posture on a lotus, her left hand resting on another lotus with a long stalk towards her face, as if to smell it. There is also a lotus-bud in the right hand, and below it

a swan is found as trying to snatch a lotus-leaf in the front by its beak.[8] The presence of the swan helps us in identifying the goddess as Sarasvatī.

The images of Sarasvatī of earlier age are very rare, and as noted above, far from being complete with her known iconic features. Nevertheless, the above examples show some of the basic elements like lotus, lyre, manuscript and swan associated with the deity, anticipating the crystallisation of the different iconic types in the subsequent period. Among the fully developed form of the deity three distinct types may be noted from consideration of their poses, viz. seated, standing and dancing. In the following paragraphs we propose to discuss the various images of Sarasvatī found in different times and places in the Indian sub-continent in accordance with their said postures.

I. *Sitting Images* :

A two-armed bronze image of Sarasvatī of the Pāla period (C. 9th Century A. D.) hails from Nalanda (Pl. V), and is at present preserved at the National Museum, New Delhi. The goddess is seated in *lalitāsana* with her left leg pendent and plays on a boat-shaped *vīṇā*. Two attendants, also seated in *lalitāsana*, are in her two sides. The goddess wears a semi-diaphanous *cauli* across her left shoulder and a lower garment. Her ornaments include a crown on her head, pearl necklace, ear-rings and armlets. A damaged figure of a swan,

the vehicle of the goddess, is on the right lower corner of the pedestal.

An image of Sarasvatī of the 10th Century A. D. has been discovered from Malwa (Pl. VI), which is also preserved in the National Museum. Two left hands of the goddess, along with the left corner of the pedestal, are damaged. The goddess is shown seated in *lalitāsana* and holds a rosary (*akṣamālā*) in her upper right hand. The lower right hand is in the *varadamudrā*. She wears earrings, double necklace, bracelets, armlets and waist-band. Flying *gandharvas*, a couple on each side, holding long lotus stalks, are seen on the upper portion of the stela. A male figure with turban on head stands in adoration in her right side, while her counterpart on the left has totally broken away.

There is an image of Sarasvatī in the British Museum (Pl. VII). It comes from Mathura[9] and is carved out of red stone. The goddess, treated in a very simple manner, sits in *lalitāsana* on a plain pedestal with her vehicle swan presented on the face of it. She plays on a diagonally placed *vīṇā* by her two front hands and carries a rosary (*akṣamālā*) and a manuscript (*pustaka*) in her upper right and upper left hand, respectively. She wears a conical crown, necklace, bracelets and armlets. On stylistic grounds the image may be assigned to the 9th-10th Century A. D.

The Museum of the Varendra Research Society, at Rajshahi in Bangladesh, preserves three unique seated images of Sarasvatī (Pl. VIII-X). Two of

them were discovered from Chatingram (Pl. VIII) and Kalanja (Pl. IX) in the district of Bogra and the third one comes from Padumsahar tank, Deopara, Rajshahi (Pl. X). These images are specially remarkable in the sense that the usual practice of providing a swan on the pedestal as the vehicle of the goddess has been substituted by representing a frisky ram. The explanation regarding the presence of ram on the pedestal, as pointed out by Bhattasali,[10] is furnished by the mythological story in the *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* which closely associates ram and ewe with Sarasvatī. The image of Chatingram is datable in the 11th Century A. D., while the remaining two belong to the 12th Century A. D. The images are made of slate and black basalt and are beautiful specimens of medieval art. In both the images, belonging to Chatingram (Pl. VIII) and Kalanja (Pl. IX), the goddess is shown seated on a double-petalled lotus in *lalitāsana* having the right leg on a lotus placed on the back of a ram. She plays on a *vīṇā* with her front hands and holds a rosary (*akṣamālā*) and a manuscript (*pustaka*) in the upper right and left hand, respectively. She wears a crown on her head, and is decorated with beautiful earrings, double necklace, armlets, bracelets, waist-band and anklets. The flying *vidyādhāras*, the trefoil arch over the head of the goddess, the female *cauri*-bearers on her sides, the figure of the donor with folded hands and a sublime face of the goddess make the sculptures significant. The Chatingram

Sarasvatī should be specially mentioned as one of the finest examples of East Indian Sculptures.

The image of Sarasvatī discovered from Deopara, Rajshahi (Pl. X), is also an equally interesting specimen of the above variety. Here too the goddess sits in *lalitāsana* on a double-petalled lotus with her right leg on a lotus placed on the back of a ram. The upper portion of the image, together with two of her hands and their attributes, is damaged. The goddess is decked with ornaments like double pearl necklace, armlets, bracelets, ear-rings, beautiful waist-band and anklets. A mutilated figure of *cauri*-bearer stands on her left side, while the figure on the right plays on a flute. The *pañcaratha* pedestal, on which the goddess sits, shows rolling vegetable designs usually noted in Pāla-Sena sculptures of the late phase, and thus the image may be placed in the 12th century A. D.

In the Museum of the Bangiya Sahitya Parisad,[11] Calcutta, there is also a four-handed image of Sarasvatī seated on a large lotus in *lalitāsana* with the right leg resting on the back of a ram carved on the pedestal. The objects held by the goddess are : the right upper, rosary (*akṣmālā*) ; the left upper, book (*pustaka*) and the right and left lower hands *vīṇā* with a *makara* terminal.

There is also a very beautiful image of Sarasvatī in the collection of the Dacca Museum (Pl. XI). The four-armed goddess, carved in black stone, sits on a double-petalled lotus in *lalitāsana* with her right leg pendent and placed on a lotus. She

plays on a *vīṇā* with her front two hands and holds a rosary *(akṣamālā)* and a manuscript (*pustaka*) in her back right and left hand, respectively. A tiny swan, the vehicle of the goddess, is shown in the extreme proper right corner of the pedestal which is decorated with coils usually found in the 12th century Pāla-Sena sculptures. The *Kīrtimukha* in the centre of the tapering top of the *prabhavalī*, the flying *vidyādhāras*, the trefoil arch over the head of the goddess, the female *cauri*-bearers on her sides, the *pañcaratha* pedestal, the figure of the donor with folded hands in the extreme right corner —all these features, according to Banerjea,[12] typify the sculpture as one of the fully developed hieratic forms of Sarasvatī. The sculpture was found in the village of Vajrayogini, near Dacca.

In this connection it is to be noted that the objects held by these images do not correspond exactly to the description of the several *dhyānas* to be found in the different *Tantras*. The only description that corresponds to the images found in Bengal is contained in the first line of Verse 16, Chapter 48, of the *Agni Purāṇa*. Here she is described as *Pustākṣa-mālikā-hastā vīṇā-hastā Sarasvatī*, i. e. Sarasvati should have lyre, book and rosary in her hands.

Bhattasali[13] refers to a unique image of Viṣṇu discovered at Lakṣmankati in the district of Barisal, Bangladesh (Pl. XII). The image is at present in the collection of the Dacca Museum. Here Viṣṇu is shown sitting in *lalitāsana* on the out-stretched

wings of his vehicle Garuḍa, who with folded hands kneels on one leg on a lotus pedestal. The god has the *cakra* in the normal right hand, which he holds not by a handle as in the images ordinarily met with, but by the rim. In its centre is depicted the miniature figure of Cakrapuruṣa. The normal left hand of the god holds within its palm the miniature representation of Gadādevī with a mace in her right hand. The attributes of the remaining two hands are still more interesting. The right hand holds the stalk of a lotus on which sits the goddess *Gaja-Lakṣmī* anointed by a pair of elephants, and the left hand similarly holds the stalk of another lotus on which sits the goddess Sarasvatī playing on her *vīṇā*. The *vīṇā* in the hands of the goddess accompanying Viṣṇu in the images ordinarily met with is of straight shape, but here the instrument is boat-shaped, similar to one held by Samudragupta as depicted on the Lyrist type of his coins.

An image of *vīṇā-hastā Sarasvatī*, as described in the *Agni Purāṇa*, is found in a niche of a temple in Tezpur, Assam.[14] The goddess, seated in *ardha-paryaṅka* with her left leg tucked up and the right one hanging down, is shown playing on a *vīṇā*.

A beautiful image of Sarasvatī from the Bṛhadiśvara temple, Tanjore (Pl. XIII), represents her in the *padmāsana* pose on a lotus seat. She is two-armed and holds a manuscript in her left hand, which is placed on the thigh, the right hand being broken. She wears a tall crown (*mukuṭa*) with canopied projection over which rises a tree. Accor-

ding to J. N. Banerjea,[15] the tree signifies the idea of knowledge (*jñāna),* as the Bodhi-tree in the *vajrāsana* Buddha figures usually indicates. The goddess is fully bejewelled having earrings, double pearl necklace, armlets, waist-band, and a breast-band *(kuca-bandha).* She is flanked at the top by flying *vidyādhāras* and *cauri*-bearers stand by her sides. The whole composition is endowed with a sedate and tranquil calm and the resultant true knowledge is beautifully expressed. Another beautiful image of Sarasvatī from the Gaṅgāikoṇḍa Cholapuram, Tirachinapalli district (Pl. XIV), found on the north wing of the main Bṛhadiśvara temple, also represents the goddess in *padmāsana* pose on a double-petalled lotus seat. She is four-armed with rosary (*akṣamālā*) and water-vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*) in the upper right and left hand, respectively ; the front right hand is in *varadamudrā* and the front left is placed on the thigh. She wears a tall crown (*mukuṭa*), double necklace, earrings, armlets, bracelets, waist-hand and a *yajñopavīta,* leaving the upper portion of the body fully bare. These two temple images belonging to the reign period of the great Chola rulers Rājarāja and Rājendra Chola, of the early 11th century A. D., may be noted as fine examples of the Chola art.

A damaged figure of Sarasvatī of the 11th Century A. D. from Karnataka is in the possession of the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay (Pl. XV). The four-armed goddess sits in *padmāsana* on a pedestal having a manuscript in her front left hand.

The face along with the objects held by her other three hands is damaged. The goddess is adorned with a damaged tall crown, double necklace, armlets, wristlets and waist-band. She wears a sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*).

In the Kedareśvara temple, Nagalpura, Tamkuv district (Karnataka), there is a four-handed image of Sarasvatī seated in *padmāsana* on a pedestal. The goddess holds a manuscript in the front left and rosary (*akṣamālā*) in the front right hands. She also bears an elephant-goad (*aṅkuśa*) and a noose (*pāśa*) in the upper right and left hand, respectively. Her ornaments include crown, ear-rings, pearl-necklace, wristlets and armlets. From the stylistic viewpoint the image may be assigned to the 11th-12th Century A. D.

An image of Sarasvatī of the 12th Century A. D., belonging to the Mallikārjuna temple, Basarolu, Mandya district, Karnataka, carries a rosary (*akṣamālā*) and a manuscript in the front right and left hand, respectively. The upper right holds an *aṅkuśa* and the upper left, a *pāśa*. She is seated in *padmāsana* and a is bejewelled with crown, earrings (*kuṇḍalas*) double pearl-necklace, wristlets and anklets. Another Sarasvatī image of the same iconographic traits is also found in the temple, but apparently it is of a later date.

In the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa temple, Sindhaghatta, Mandya district (Karnataka), there is an image of Sarasvatī sitting in *padmāsana*, and holding in her hands attributes like *akṣamālā*, *aṅkuśa*, *pāśa*

and *pustāka*. Her iconic peculiarity is the sacred thread that she wears across the left shoulder. The face of the deity is a bit damaged, but she is decked as usual with an elaborately decorated crown, double necklace and bracelets. A swan as the vehicle of the goddess is represented below her in the centre of the lower portion of the pedestal.

An image of Sarasvatī in the Nāgeśvara temple, Mosale, Hassan district (Pl. XVIII), belongs to the 12th Century A. D. She holds a rosary, a *pāśa*, an *aṅkuśa* in the front right, upper right and upper left hand, respectively, while her left front hand is in the *varadamudrā*. She wears a *karaṇḍa mukuṭa*, earrings (*karṇa-kuṇḍala*), necklace, bracelets, wristlets and anklets. This image is especially significant on the ground that a bull as a vehicle of the goddess sits by the left side of the pedestal. Bull is hardly found as a vehicle (*vāhana*) of Sarasvatī.

A four-handed image of Sarasvatī, sitting in *padmāsana* on a pedestal, helongs to the Chennigaraya temple, Nagalpura, Tumkuv district. The goddess holds a manuscript and a rosary in the front left and right hand, respectively, while there is an *aṅkuśa* in her upper right hand. The upper left hand, which is totally lost, possibly held the usual *pāśa*. Elaborately ornate, the image is found to wear a sacred-thread.

An interesting seated image of Sarasvatī in the *lalitāsana* in the Lakṣmī-Narasiṁha temple, Hosaholalu, Mandya district, holds an *aṅkuśa* and

a *vīṇā* in the right hands, and a *pāśa* and a *sudhābhāṇḍa* in the left upper and lower hand, respectively Her face is damaged. The pedestal on which the seat of the goddess is placed is very beautifully decorated. Her crown, earrings double necklace, bracelets and anklets are also like those of other South Indian images of the Hoysala School.

An image of Sarasvatī, also belonging to the Hoyśala school, has been preserved in the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay (Pl. XIX). The four-armed goddess sits in *padmāsana* on a double lotus seat holding a rosary, a goad (*aṅkuśa*) and *pāśa* in her three hands, the left lower hand being broken. She wears rich ornaments of different varieties and a sacred thread *(yajñopavīta)* in her body. Two female *cauri*-bearers, one on each side, stand by her. From the elaborate stela, with undulating rolls connecting the *kīrtimukha* at its top and two *makaras* on the sides, and also from its metallic chiselling, the image appears to have been carved sometime in the later part of the 12th Century A. D.

An interesting image of Sarasvatī belonging to the 12th Century A. D. has been discovered from Halebid, Mysore (Pl. XX). The goddess sits in *lalitāsana* on a dragon-like peacock which holds by its beak the stalk of a trailing plant. The goddess is three-faced and six-handed. In her left hands she holds a pot (*sudhābhāṇḍa*), a *pāśa* and a goad (*aṅkuśa*), while in her right hands shows a rosary

(*akṣamālā*), a lyre (*vīṇā*) and a trident (*śūla*), as Śakti of Śiva. She is richly bejewelled with ornaments like decorated crown, earrings, double necklace, bracelets and anklets. The figures of the donor and his wife with folded hands are also there on the decorated pedestal. This Halebid Sarasvatī represents a unique type, especially from the iconographical viewpoint.

In the Bucheśvara temple, Koravangala, Hassan district, Karnataka (Pl. XXI), there is an image of Sarasvatī belonging to the 13th Century A. D. The goddess sits in *padmāsana* holding rosary (*akṣamālā*), elephant goad (*aṅkuśa*), noose (*pāśa*) and manuscript (*pustaka*) in her four hands. She is fully bejewelled with an elaborately decorated heavy crown, pearl necklace, armlets, bracelets, waist-band and anklets. A four-handed image of Sarasvatī from Halebid also shows similiar attributes in her four hands. It is now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta. The goddess sits in usual *padmāsana* on a double lotus throne and is decorated with ornaments of different varieties. The *Kīrtimukha* on the top of the stela has gained importance in comparison with the above discussed image. This image is extremely conventional in style and therefore appears to be of a very late date, say of the 13th Century A. D.

The image of Sarasvatī from Bagali, representing a very late example of Hoyśāla style of the 13th Century A. D., is seated in *padmāsana* pose and shows rosary and *aṅkuśa* in the right and *pustaka*

and *pāśa* in the left hands. It had an elaborate aureole behind, now broken, and shows the feeling for minute details of the medieval art trend. The right front hand, which holds the rosary, has apparently been raised in *abhaya* pose. The seated posture as well as the closed eyes with raised eyebrows speaks of her meditative concentration.

The image of Sarasvatī from Gadag,[16] a Chalukyan specimen, is found seated in *padmāsana* with four arms, but unfortunately all the arms are missing. An image of Sarasvatī in Kāllesvara temple at Hirahadgalli[17] has four arms, but here, too, all of them are missing. It is also of the 13th Century A. D. and its peculiarity is a pretty swan elevated on the face of the central projection of the *saptaratha* pedestal. On the other faces of the *ratha* figures of dancing girls are carved. Another image of Sarasvatī in the same temple has four hands, one of the right hands being broken at the elbow. She is seated with piers behind supporting a scroll of canopy. A swan is depicted on the pedestal.

A beautiful image of Sarasvatī in the Chalukyan Bhimeśvara temple at Bhimararam, seated in the *padmāsana* on a lotus, has four hands exhibiting *abhay* pose by the lower right hand, and holding a *viṇā* and a book in the remaining ones. In the temple of the Heroes at Karempudi, on the eastern wall is an image of Sarasvatī in sitting posture. This image has four arms, three of which are broken

and the fourth shows a club. Beneath her a swan is carved.

In the manuscript of the *Devi-māhātya of Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, preserved in the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, there is a beautiful painting of Sarasvatī seated on the back of a peacock (Pl. XXII). The goddess holds the attributes by her four hands in the following manner : lower left—lotus (*padma*), upper left—lyre (*viṇā*), upper right—book (*pustaka*) and lower right—lotus (*padma*). She wears ornaments of very simple type, but her long hairs fall upto the knee.

Another four-handed image of Sarasvatī from Gaya (Pl. XXIII) has been preserved in the Museum of Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi, Bangladesh. The image, though incomplete, exhibits her iconic features. The goddess plays on a *vīṇā* by her two front hands, and holds a manuscript and a rosary in her upper left and right hand, respectively.

A six-armed image of Sarasvatī, seated on a pedestal, containing the relief of a swan, is found in the Bhrameśvara temple at Srisailam.[16] She is holding a *pāśa* and a *paraśu* in the right hands, and an *aṅkuśa* and an indistinct object in the upper left hand, the lower left being in the *varadamudrā*.

II. Standing Images :

A standing bronze image of two-armed Sarasvatī, discovered from Nalanda and preserved in the Patna Museum (Pl. XXIV), shows in her two hands

a *vīṇā*. From her posture it appears that the cords of the instrument are being tuned. She wears a lower garment upto the ankle and a short *cauli* across her breasts. Her headdress is of *karaṇḍa-mukuṭa* type and she is decorated with various ornaments including double necklace, earrings, armlets, anklets, waist-band, etc. She stands in a slightly bent (*ābhaṅga*) pose.

J. N. Banerjea[19] studies a sculpture, belonging th the 10th Century A. D., hailing from Khiching (Orissa) (Pl. XXV), along with the Bharhut relief. It shows the half-length figure of a seven-hooded Nāginī playing on a *vīṇā*. She is beautifully decorated with ornaments and wearing a *karaṇḍa-mukuṭa,* usualy worn by the goddesses. Banerjea has aptly observed that the number of the hoods behind her head and the type of headdress worn by her distincty prove that she is not an ordinary snake maiden, but is a goddess with much icono-graphic affinity with Sarasvatī. It may be suggested here that in *Atharva-veda* a reference to Sarasvatī with snake has been made. In the Buddhist pantheon too, Jāṅgulī, the goddess of the snakes, is also sometimes equated with Sarasvatī. It may thus be noted that association of the goddess with snake, though not so pronounced, had a long antiquity.

An important Brahmanical sculpture of the early medieval period preserved in the British Museum[20] is a life-size inscribed image of Vāgdevī, the goddess of speech, carved out of grey sandstone

(Pl. XXVI). The image bears an inscription on its pedestal recording its installation in the city of King Bhoja in Sambat 1091, i. e. 1037 A. D. King Bhoja is evidently the Paramāra king of Malwa of that name who reigned from 1018 to 1060 A. D. The name of the sculptor, Manathala, is also inscribed in the pedestal. The four hands along with the objects held by the goddess are broken. In the upper right hand a part of a broken lyre may be identified. The pearl garlands, encircling her breasts follow the prescription of the texts (*hāro-muktā-bharaṇa-bhuṣitam*), while the expression of the face recalls the verses describing her serenity. A lion (*siṁha*) being her vehicle (*vāhana*), she may be identified as Vāgdevī. Two male attendants, one is shown bearded and holding a staff in the left hand, and the other representing a dwarfish figure holding a nectar pot, are on her right side. To her left is a female figure, seated on the lion, and with right hand supplicating to the goddess. This Sarasvatī probably symboliszes Pārvatī or the *Śakti* of Śiva, and represents, a *sāttvika* aspect. The goddess wears rich ornaments like the crown, the necklace, the armlets, the bracelets, the pendant round the loin and anklets. "An example of Brahmanical Sculpture—it is a *'chef d'oeuvre* of rare beauty in its exquisite serenity of pose, in its entrancing and balancing rhythm, in the elegance and suavity of its aquiline features, and in the general restraint in the treatment of the anatomy which is almost wholly free from any exaggera-

tion."[21] It is a remarkable piece of West Indian medieval sculpture.

Sarasvatī had been popularly represented as one of the consorts of Viṣṇu—a fact which is amply corroborated by the numerous images of the Pāla-Sena period in which she is shown as accompanying Viṣṇu by his left as *Puṣṭi*, while Lakṣmī standing to the right. From the scarcity of independent Sarasvatī images in eastern India, it seems that she was usually worshipped during the period as a consort of Viṣṇu. A beautiful bronze image of Viṣṇu from Rangpur, Bangladesh (Pl. XXVII), and now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, shows Sarasvatī as a *pārśva-devatā*. The goddess stands in *tribhaṅga* posture holding noose (*pāśa*) in her left hand, while the right hand being in *abhaymudrā*. She puts on a diaphanous lower garment and wears crown, necklace. armlets, bracelets, bangles and waist-band as ornaments.

There are also stone sculptures of Sarasvatī in the Indian Museum (Pl. XXVI), which similarly depict her as a *pārśva-devatā* of Viṣṇu. The goddess stands on the left side of Viṣṇu on a lotus, and shows a *tribhaṅga* pose. She puts on a lower garment with highly conventionalised undulating striations leaving the upper portion of the body fully bare. She is decked with various ornaments and plays on a *vīṇā* by both the hands. A subordinate figure, Chakra-puruṣa is found to be standing by her left side in *abhaymudrā*.

There is a beautiful two-armed stone image of

Sarasvatī of the Pāla-Sena age in the Ashutosh Museum, Calcutta[22] (Pl. XXIX). The goddess, a *Pārsvadevatā* of Viṣṇu stands gracefully in the *tribhaṅga* pose and plays on a *vīṇā*. She puts on various jewelleries and her coiffure is tastefully decorated. The youthful figure of the deity shows dynamic quality. Her soft smiling face is fully enliven. Another stone figure of Sarasvatī of the Pala age, belonging to the Patna Museum,[23] is equally interesting. The two-armed goddess, standing in *tribhaṅga* pose, is represented as holding a *vīṇā* by her left hand, while the right hand is placed on the waist.

In the Bangiya Sahitya Parisad Museum,[24] there are several bejewelled images of Sarasvatī standing in *ābhaṅga* and *tribhaṅga* poses, holding *viṇā* in hand. But in all of them she is represented as a companion of Viṣṇu. The examples of this type of Sarasvatī are found in abundance in different parts of Bengal and Bihar, and they agree with the later Puranic evidence that Sarasvatī came to be regarded a consort of Viṣṇu.

In recent times museum of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture of Visva-Bharati has obtained a standing Sarasvatī image from West Bengal (see *Frontispiece*), which is undoubtedly a significant collection because of the rarity of independent images of the goddess in eastern India. The goddess is four-handed, carrying *vīṇā* by the two front hands, and *pustaka* and *akṣamālā* by the left and the right back hands. She is attended by

two flanking *caurī*-bearers, while two garland-bearing gandharvas are shown above on the stela. She stands on a full-blown double-petalled lotus in slight flexion, her eyes are half-closed in meditative mood. Tastily ornate the figure of the goddess is a fine piece of art and stylistically belongs to the 10th Century A.D.

Assam also yields a number of Sarasvatī images bearing lyre (*vīṇā*) in her hands. A Sarasvatī, recovered from Sibsagar (Pl. XXX), stands with a *vīṇā* held in her two hands across the chest. She wears a *ratna-kuṇḍala-hāra*, girdles and anklets. The compositional simplicity of the figure, wearing semi-diaphanous drapery flowing round her body, marks it out as one of the most elegant examples of the early art of Assam. The figure, which may safely be dated in the 10th-11th Century A. D., shows a smiling face and a tri-bent form. In its physiognomical treatment the regional ethnic impact is clearly noted. A similar but less artistic form of Sarasvatī has been recovered from the ruins of the Tāmreśvarī temple at Sadiya by Bloch.[25]

In the Allahabad Museum there is a sculpture[26] from Jamsot (Pl. XXXI), representing Sarasvatī. It is carved out of buff coloured sandstone. The image represents the goddess standing in *tribhaṅga* pose. She holds diagonally a comparatively long *vīṇā* by her two hands, while she carries a lotus by the upper right hand, the lower left being broken. A swan can be seen near

her feet. Another image of Sarasvatī from Jamsot represents the goddess seated in the *ardhaparyaṅka* pose. Four out of her eight hands are hroken and so also her head. She carries a *vīṇā* by her two hands, while by her other three left hands she holds severally a manuscript, a bell and a pot. Her mount, the swan, may be seen near her feet. Both the images of Sarasvatī from Jamsot are datable in the 10th Century A. D.

III. Dancing Sarasvatī :

Sarasvatī with elaborated attributes makes her appearance several times on the Hoyaśāleśvara temple at Halebid,[27] Karnataka, where she is sometimes shown dancing. The six-armed dancing images of Sarasvatī from Halebid are considered as the *śakti* of Śiva, possibly for holding rosary, *aṅkuśa,* and *pāśa,* the *āyudhas* of Śiva along with her usual attributes like lotus, *vīṇā* with a bamboo stem and *pustaka.* She is flanked by two *caurī*-bearers and near her feet her vehicle, the swan, is shown. She wears a *jaṭā-mukuṭa* and is elaborately decked with various ornaments.

There are several dancing images of Sarasvatī from Halebid having a calm facial expression. A four-handed image[28] with *śūla* in the upper right, noose in the upper left and *kamaṇḍalu* in the lower left hand and a crown on head, having *chatra, prabhāmaṇḍala* and *toraṇa,* may be referred to. The goddess is fully ornamented. As for posture, her

left foot is placed just below the right knee and her right foot rests on a lotus. On her left is a man beating a drum, while another standing on her right, and almost totally broken, possibly played with cymbal.

A six-handed dancing image of Sarasvatī has also been recovered from Halebid. The goddess is richly ornamented, and holds a disc (*cakra*), mace (*śūla*) and a *vīṇā* by her three hands; the attributes in her other three hands are damaged and beyond recognition. It also appears to be a beautiful specimen of Hoyaśāla art.

An eight-handed image of dancing Sarasvatī, belonging to the 12th Century A. D., is found in the Lakṣmī-Narasiṁha temple, Hosaholalu, Mandya district, Karnataka (Pl. XXXII). The goddess holds *vīṇā*, *aṅkuśa*, *śūla*, *pustaka* and *pāśa*. The objects held by her other two hands are irrecognisable. Her crown is smaller, but there is an elaborately decorated *toraṇa* over her head. Her left foot is placed just below the right knee and the right foot is on a lotus base on the pedestal. On her left side a man, standing on the pedestal, beats a drum while the figure on her right is totally broken. The goddess is richly ornamented with pearl necklace, armlets, bracelets, girdles and anklets, and remarkable for its artistic beauty.

Another four-handed image of dancing Sarasvatī, preserved in the Aghoreśvara temple, Govindanhalli, Mandya district, Karnatka holds, a *vīṇā* by two front hands and a *pāśa* by the upper left, while the

upper right is broken. A small swan is seen on her left side on the pedestal. She is richly ornamented, but her face is very much eroded. A six-handed image of dancing Sarasvatī from the Kṛṣṇa temple at Somanathapura, Karnataka (Pl. XXXIII) may be especially noted for representing the Hoyaśāla art in its best creative phase. The goddess holds *vīṇā*, *śūla*, a lotus stalk, *pustaka* and *pāśa*. She is richly bejewelled and wears a decorated *Karaṇḍamukuṭa* on her head. Even in her dance she is found to be absorbed in deep meditation, the closed eyes being its indication.

The image of Sarasvatī playing on a *vīṇā* from Madurai[29] is a specimen of Nāyaka school which reached its climax under Tirumala Nāyaka (1523-1557 A. D.) at Srirangam, Kumbakonam, Madurai. The goddess standing in *tribhaṅga* pose plays on a *vīṇā* by her two hands.

A study of the Sarasvatī images belonging to northern India, makes it quite evident that they are either two-armed or four-armed. When two-armed, she usually holds a *vīṇā* in her hands. Sarasvatī with a *vīṇā* appears in Indian art from a very early date. Her earliest possible representation being a proto-Sarasvatī upon the Bharhut railing of the 2nd Century B. C. In another variety, as noted in the Lucknow Museum example, the two-armed Sarasvatī is provided with a manuscript in one of her hands. The other hand of the image being broken, we are not sure about the object held by it, probably the object was a pen as enjoined by the

Sāradātilaka-tantra and the *Śilparatna*. In her four-armed variety, she is represented in the sculptures of early medieval school of Bengal and Bihar with a *vīṇā* in her front hands and a rosary and a manuscript in the back hands. It is in accordance with the prescription of the *Agni Purāṇa*. It seem that the sculptors of Bengal and Bihar carved the majority of the images of Sarasvatī following the advice of the *Agni Purāṇa*. Images of Sarasvatī with four hands are found to be differently prepared in other parts of the country. Usually the vehicle of the goddess is a swan, the earliest representation of which may be found in an example from Ghanṭasāla (Andhra State) belonging to the 2nd Century B. C. A ram, a bull, or a lion is also provided to her as a vehicle. The peacock, another vehicle of her, is however scarcely found in north Indian images. Disalkar has identified a Kuṣāṇa sculpture having peacock as the vehicle of the goddess, but the sculpture being mutilated and almost beyond recognition, the said identification is not without doubt.

Different types of Sarasvatī images from both north and south India with various iconographic features have been noted above. They show characteristic *āyudhas, āsanas* and *vāhanas* associated with her. Basically there is no iconographical difference between the Sarasvatīs of the north and the south. But the north Indian images rarely represent her as the *śakti* of Śiva, which appears to be a popular aspect of the south Indian variety of

Sarasvatī. Sarasvatī with more than four arms is not known in the northern part of the country, nor has she been shown with a breast-band (*kucabandha*). The swan as the vehicle of the goddess can be found both in northern and southern India. A specimen having bull as the vehicle of the goddes, has been found from southern India. Literary as well as archaeological evidence testifies to peacock as the vehicle of the goddess Sarasvatī. But in the Brahmanical traditions it is very restrictedly represented, particularly in comparison with swan.

VI

SARASVATĪ IN JAINA PANTHEON

Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning and speech, is held in high esteem by the Jainas and the Buddhists in a way not different from the Hindus. But she appears to have been portrayed more prominently in Jainism than in Buddhism. According to B. C. Bhattacharyya,[1] "She (Sarasvatī) seems to be at the collective body of the sixteen Vidyādevīs and her worship is prior to that of other subordinate deities." These sixteen Vidyādevīs are : Rohinī, Prajñapti, Vajra-Sriṅhalā, Vajrāṅkuśā, Apraticakrā or Jambunāda, Puruṣadatta, Kālī, Mahākālī, Gaurī, Gāndhārī, Acyuptā, Manasi and Mahāmanasi. A. C. Vidyabhusan[2] also gives a list of sixteen Vidyādevīs, but his list does not conform as a whole to the list offered by Bhattacharyya. The names like Vajrāṅkuśā and Apraticakrā or Jambunāda are replaced by Kulisāṁkuśā or Manobagā and Cakreśvarī in the list of Vidyabhusan. Though in Jainism the Vidyādevīs are so numerous, it is significant that their conception and attributes disclose clear points of identity. The attributes of lute, book and rosary are generally common. But it is curious to note that U. P. Shah[3] does not like to connect the conception of Vidyādevīs

with that of Sarasvatī. He is of the opinion that Sarasvatī is unmistakably the goddess of learning and is in no way connected with the sixteen Vidyādevīs of the Jaina pantheon. He further points out that B. C. Bhattacharyya's recognition of Sarasvatī as the head of a collective body of sixteen Vidyādevīs is not supported by any Jaina tradition so far known. Shah refers to a good number of Jaina texts on the basis of which he draws the above conclusion. With this background an attempt will made in this chapter to analyse the various literary texts and archaeological findings for drawing a clear picture of Sarasvatī purely from the Jaina point of view.

I. Textual Information :

According to Jainism, knowledge is five-fold : *Mati-jñāna* or ordinary knowledge, *Śruta-jñāna* or knowledge from scriptures, *Avadhi-jñāna* or supernatural cognition, *Manaḥparyāya-jñāna* or knowlege derived from perception of the thoughts of others and *Kevala-jñāna* or omniscience. Sarasvatī as a goddess of learning is invoked by the Jainas for dispelling the darkness of ignorance, for removing the infatuation caused by the *Jñānāvaraṇīya* karma, i. e. the karma-matter covering right knowledge, and for destroying all miseries. She is thus the bestower of knowledge and symbol of Purity. Her white complexion and the attributes like *puṇḍarika* (white

lotus) and *hamsa* (swan) are the known Indian symbols of purity.

Sarasvatī is recognised by the Jainas as the superintending deity of knowledge and learning. She is variously named as *Śrutadevatā*, *Sāradā*, *Bhāratī*, *Bhāṣā*, *Vāc*, *Vāc-devatā*, *Vāgiśvarī*, *Vāgvādinī*, *Vāṇī* and *Brāhmī*.[4] She is invoked in various forms like the other deities of the Jaina pantheon. As Śrutadevatā, she presides over the *Śruta* or preachig of the Tīrthaṅkaras. The *Dvādaśāṅga* or the twelve *aṅga* texts[5] are described as the different limbs of the Śrutadevatā, while the fourteen *Pūrva* texts are said to be her ornaments.[6]

Sarasvatī enjoys unquestionable popularity among the Jainas from the very ancient times. The antiquity of her worship can be established from the literary references found in the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*,[7] the *Mahāniśītha Sūtra*,[8] the *Pākṣika Sūtra*[9] the *Pañcāsaka*,[10] and the *Saṁsāradāvānala-stotra*[11] of Haribhadra Suri, and the *Sarasvatī-kalpa*[12] of Bappabhaṭṭi Suri. The information collected from these literary evidences are found to be corroborated from the iconographical viewpoints by the archaeological findings of various Sarasvatī images of the Jainas, most of which are installed in different temples all over India.

The Śvetāmbaras hold special festivals in honour of Sarasvatī on the *Jñāna-pañcamī* day which is the fifth-day of the bright fortnight in the month of Kārtika, while the Digambaras observe *Śruta-pañcamī* day which falls on the fifth-day of the bright half

of Jyeṣṭha, Besides these, special penance like *Śrutadevatā-tapas*, *Śrutaskandha-vratas*, *Śruta-jñāna-vratas* and *Śruta-bhaktis* are practised and undertaken by the Jainas of both the sects.

The Śvetāmbaras and the Digambaras have propounded different *dhyānas* of Sarasvatī. They reveal three varieties of forms, namely, the two-armed, the four-armed and the multi-armed. The chief symbols of recognition of the deity appear to be the book of eternal knowledge and the swan vehicle which is sometimes replaced by a peacock.

In the *Kalyāṇakāṇḍa-stuti*,[13] the *dhyāna* of Vāgīśvarī occurs in Prākṛt. It may be translated in the following way: "May the much-adored Vāgīsvarī, white like the *kunda* flower (i. e. Jasmine), the moon, milk and snow, resting on a lotus seat and holding the book and the lotus, bring perpetual happiness on us." Bappabhaṭṭi Suri also describes Sarasvatī holding lotus and manuscript in her two hands.[14] According to the *Pañcakalpa-bhāṣya*, the goddess holds the book in her left hand.[15] A few verses at the end of the *Bhagavatī-Sūtra* also refer to Śrutadevatā as bearing a full-blown lotus in her hand.[16] In *Sāradā-stavāṣṭaka*, Munisundara Suri gives different symbols for the goddess, who is said to hold the lyre (*vīṇā*) and the book (*pustaka*) in her two hands. A swan is mentioned there as her vehicle (i. e. *vāhana*).[17] In *Śrīsarasvatī-stotra*[18] it is also mentioned that the goddess plays on her *vīṇā* with both the hands, while the swan vehicle appears to be enchanted with the divine music.

Again, Śubhacandra, the author of the *Sārasvata-yantra-pūjā* gives another form of the goddess under the epithet *Mayūravāhinī*. According to him, Mayūravāhinī, white like the moon, shining with three eyes, and riding on a peacock, holds the rosary and the book in her hands.[19] Haribhadra Suri points out that the lotus as a distinctive symbol is usually associated with Sarasvatī.[20]

In the *Śrīsarasvatī-kalpa*[21] the goddess of learning is described as white in complexion and holding in her hands the lyre, the book, the rosary of pearls and the white lotus. Besides, she puts on a white garment and wears pearl ornaments. Bappabhaṭṭi Suri gives one more form under the name of Vāgdevī who stands on a white lotus and shows the *abhaya*, the *varada*, the book and the lotus in her four hands.[22] A third form is also prescribed by the same author in the following way : "An image of the goddess should be drawn which would show her seated on a lotus in *padmāsana*, with lotuses in her hands ; she should be adorned with a hexagonal crown over her head and a four-petalled lotus on the navel." The *Ācāradinakara* also gives the same form[23] : Śrutadevatā is white, puts on white garments and rides on a swan. Rays of light radiate from her person and she sits on a white lion-throne. She is four-armed : the two left hands hold the white lotus and the *vīṇā* and the two right carry the book and the rosary of pearls. Jinaprabha Suri, the author of the *Vividhatīrtha-kalpa* (14th Cent. A. D.), gives the same form in his *Śārada-*

stava,[24] but adds a lotus-seat. Another hymn given in the *Sūrimantra-ārādhanāvidhi* of the tradition of Jinaprabha Suri gives the same form.[25] Bālacandra Suri, the author of the *Vasanta-vilāsa-mahākāvya,* who was well-known as *Siddha-sārasvata,* i. e. one who had successfully practised the *sādhanā* of Sarasvatī, and who flourished in the 13th Century A. D., vividly describes the form of *Śrīsāradā* which he had the good fortune to realise in a yogic trance. He saw the goddess holding the usual symbols, namely, lotus, *viṇā,* rosary and book.[26]

According to the *Nirvāṇakalikā,* Śrutadevatā should be represented white, riding on a swan and showing in her two right hands the *varada* attitude and a lotus, and in the two left hands a book and a rosary.[27]

The Digambara text *Pratiṣṭhāsāroddhāra* refers to her as riding on a peacock but gives no iconographic details.[28] The *Jinasaṁhitā* of Ekasandhi represents another Digambara tradition. According to this authority. Vāṇī is white, wears a divine garment of white colour and sits on a lotus in the *paryaṅkāsana,* She is three-eyed and four-armed, showing the *jñāna-mudrā,* the rosary, the *abhaya* and the book in her hands. She wears a *jaṭā-mukuṭa* over her head.[29] The *Vidyānuśāsana,*[30] the *Sarasvatī-kalpa* of Arhaddasa[31] and the *Sarasvatī-kalpa* of Mallisena[32] also describe the same form and add the information that she rides on a peacock.

The *Paṭhitasiddhasārasvata,* attributed to a

certain Jaina nun (*sādhvī*) called Śivaryā, gives yet another form. According to her, the goddess is said to show the book, the lotus, the *jñāna-mudrā* and the *varada* in her hands. The swan is her vehicle.[33]

The *Vidyānuvādāṅga-jinendra-kalyāṇābhyudaya* refers to Sarasvatī under a novel name, Brāhmī, and describes her as shining with the *pravacana* or *vyākhyāna-mudrā*, the rosary, the *abhaya* and the fruit in her four hands. The goddess is white and has three faces. She has a lotus-seat, while the peacock is her *vāhana*.[34] One more form is given by the same text in which Sarasvatī, under the name Bhāṣā, is described as white in complexion, riding on a swan and showing the *pāśa*, the lotus, the book and the *abhaya-mudrā* in her four hands.[35]

A verse is in the *Sāradā-stotra* of Malayakīrti states that the right lower hand of the goddess Sarasvatī shows the *varada-mudrā*, right upper hand rosary, left lower hand a *pustaka* and the left upper hand a lotus.[36]

Reference to the form of Sarasvatī is found in the *Nirvāṇakalikā* which says that the *Devādhidevatā* of the *Dvādaśāṅga-śruta* is of white colour and she holds the book, the rosary, the lotus, the *varada* and various other symbols in her numerous hands.[37] Later Tantric texts of the Jainas enjoin her worship in all the Tantric rites, such as, the *Śāntika, pauṣṭika, stambhana, māraṇa, ucātana*,[38] etc., while the *Śrīsarasvatī-kālpa* of Bappabhaṭṭi Suri describes only the propitiatory rites, leaving aside

the cruel ones. But the *Sarasvatī-kalpa*, attributed to Arhaddasa,[39] describes in a *stotra* the terrific form of the goddess.

With this elaborate information on Sarasvatī in relation to her concepts as well as complexion, attributes, vehicles and rites, obtained from the ancient and medieval Jaina texts, we may now proceed to appraise her iconographical features on the basis of actual images discovered in the various parts of the country.

II. Actual Images :

The Locknow Museum image (Pl. III), discovered from Kaṅkālīṭilā, near Mathura, though mutilated, appears to be the earliest known representation of the Jaina goddess Sarasvatī. It has already been described along with the images of Sarasvatī hailing from Bharhut and Ghanṭasāla which are thought to be the depiction of the deity before the crystallisation of her distinct iconic forms. The images of Sarasvatī belonging immediately before and after the Christian era are very limited in number and in the absence of archaelogical findings there exists a wide gap of actual images between the 1st and the 7th Century A. D. We thus begin with a reference to the metal images of Jaina Sarasvatī of the 7th Century A. D. discovered from Akota and at present preserved at the Baroda Museum, Baroda. Of them one of the notable pieces of the image of Sarasvatī was gifted by the nun Isiya[40] (*c*, 600-620 A. D.).

The goddess (Pl. XXXIV) stands on the flat surface of the pedestal which might have been separately cast. The halo is slightly oblong and plain except for the familiar beaded border. She carries in her right hand a lotus with a long stalk that rests on the pedestal. A scarf is worn around her shoulders, the ends of which fall to the pedestal. The scarf shows a bead design followed at both the ends by a geometrical motif. The lower garment of the goddess also shows a pattern of triangles formed by slanting lines between the broad horizontal bands. The ornaments include an *ekāvali* with a pendant and *uraḥ-sūtra,* The crown is of the *trikūṭa* type. The hair of the goddess is tied in a large chignon which is visible behind the crown.

The lower garment is worn in the *vikacchha* fashion, a characteristic of the images of this hoard. The modelling of the torso is somewhat stunted with full breasts, a stump-like waist and a gently swelling abdomen. The slight outward thurst of the right hip and the corresponding bend of the left knee give a certain animation to the figure. The face shows elongated eyes with large eye-balls and drooping lids to express concentration. The broad forehead is marked with a circular *tilaka.* There is an inscription in the pedestal stating that the image was the gift of Isiya, a nun. The characters are assignable to 600-620 A. D., to which period the image may be dated.

Two other images[41] of this type have also been preseved in the Baroda Museum. However,

from stylistic consideration the images appear to have been cast sometime after the Akota Sarasvatī discussed above.

Another damaged image of Sarasvatī,[42] belonging to the 7th Centry A. D., also comes from Akota. The image is in two pieces and the pedestal is lost. A fragment of the halo is seen behind the left ear. The arrangement of the scarf and the long lotus stalk are similar to the other Sarasvatī images discovered from Akota. She wears a crown with five, instead of three, leaf-like projections. There is a big bun on the top of the head. The goddess wears *kuṇḍalas*, necklace, *uraḥ-sūtra* and a girdle with a long pendant falling on the left leg. The style and modelling are also similar, though the armlets and the lower garments are different. The image may be assigned to c. 700-725 A. D.

An interesting bronze image of Sarasvati[43] (Pl. XXXV), probably found in the Karnataka region and now preserved in the British Museum, stands in an elegant manner with her weight on the right leg, while the left leg is slightly advanced and bent at the knee. With a lotus bud in the right hand and a manuscript in the left, she is looking downwards in the attitude of disseminating knowledge to her devotees. A Tīrthaṅkara sits above her head in meditation. It is datable to the 10-11th Century A. D.

Another variety of the goddess Sarasvatī is found on a pillar of the unique Caumukha temple at Ranakapur in the Jodhpur State. The goddess,

standing in the *tribhaṅga* pose, plays on her *vīṇā* with both the hands, while the swan vehicle, resting near the right foot, appears to be enchanted by the divine music.[44]

A beautiful image from the ruins of the Deogarh temple[45] has been identified by U. P. Shah as Sarasvatī. The goddess stands in the *tribhaṅga* attitude and carries a lotus in the raised left hand. The right hand, showing the *varada-mudrā*, holds rosary as well. On her right, left and the top are carved images of the twenty-four Tīrthaṅkaras. On her right, between the Jinas and herself, is the small figure of a male attendant holding a pitcher. The presence of the twenty-four Jinas clearly proves that the goddess must hold a unique position in the Jaina pantheon. She may be taken to represent Sarasvatī or Śruta-devatā, the deified form of speech of all the twenty-four Jinas. The lotus as a distinctive symbol is associated with Sarasvatī by the earliest Jaina works, while the *varada-akṣamālā* may have replaced the book of the earlier two-armed images.

With the above tradition we may identify a metal image from Murtijapur, now preserved in the Central Museum, Nagpur, representing the goddess Sarasvatī. The presence of a Jina figure above her head clearly shows that the deity belongs to the Jaina pantheon. The goddess holds the book in her left hand, while the right hand is engaged in carrying a small stick, in all probability representing a pen. The goddess sits on a lotus in *lalitāsana*.

Her hair is dressed in a peculiar fashion. The image appears to belong to the Digambara sect.

A marble image of Sarasvatī is found carved on the ceiling dome of the *maṇḍapa* of the Vimala Vasahi temple at Dilwara (Mt. Abu, Rajasthan).[46] The goddess seated in *padmāsana*, with her body quite erect, shows rosary, lotus, *vīṇā*, and book as her attributes. Vidyādhāras fly above, whereas the small figures, probably representing donors, kneel at the bottom of the throne. In this example Sarasvatī is being saluted by two architects who built the Vimala Vasahi temple. The bearded architect to the right of the goddess is inscribed as Loyana Sūtradhara, the other holding the measuring rod is named as Sūtradhara Kela. The goddess is elegantly ornamented. A small swan as the vehicle is seen in the pedestal.

A black stone image of Sarasvatī[47] from Arthuna in the Banswara State, and now preserved in the Rajputana Museum, Ajmer, shows the goddess holding rosary, lotus, *vīṇā*, and book in her four hands. The *mukuṭa* of the gooddess is surmounted by a small Jina figure. Another image of similar type is worshipped in the famous Pañcasāra temple at Patna. The beauty of the image is somewhat spoilt by the artificial eyes and the red and black marks of a permanent nature.

A notable figure of Sarasvatī, with *vīṇā*, lotus, *varada* and book in her four hands, is found amongst the sculptures on the back wall of the Neminātha temple at Kumbharia. The swan

vehicle is here very artistically represented. On the pillar in the temple built by Tejopala at Mt. Abu, we find a figure of Sarasvatī seated in *bhadrāsana* and showing the same attributes with the difference that the book in the left lower is replaced by a *kamaṇḍalu.*

A metal image from a Śvetāmbara temple in Dabhoi and a stone sculpture from the ruins of the Jaina temples at eogarh Fort Dshow a set of *āyudhas* in the following order : the lotus and the book in the left and the *varada* and the rosary in the right hands. Similar form of the goddess in standing posture is also found amongst the sculptures on the outer wall of the shrine in the Kharatara Vasahi temple at Mt. Abu. It may be noted that these images show female attendants standing beside the goddess. The Deogarh image apparently represents the Digambara tradition since these temples were built by the Digambaras.

An image carved on a pillar in the Vimala Vasahi temple, Mt. Abu, shows the goddess Sarasvatī in a standing attitude and holding lotuses in the two upper hands ; the right lower hand is mutilated, while the left lower carries a book. This form has been further illustrated in a palm-leaf miniature (Pl. XXXVI) from a manuscript of the *Jñātasūtra,* dated 1127 A. D., and preserved in the Santinath Bhandara, Cambay.[48] Here the goddess, standing in *tribhaṅga,* holds the rosary in the right lower, *pustaka* in the left lower and the lotuses in the upper two hands. The swan, her vehicle, is shown

beside the left leg. Two male attendants with folded hands sit by her two sides.

A number of Sarasvatī images from Rajasthan represent her somewhat differently. A beautiful white marble image from Pallu (Pl. XXXVII), Bikaner, datable to the Cauhān period, i. e. the 12th Century A. D., stands gracefully in the *tribhaṅga* pose on a fully blossomed lotus. The four-armed goddess exhibits *varada-mudrā* along with rosary on her front right palm, while the front left hand holds a *kamaṇḍalu.* She carries a lotus with her back right hand and a manuscript in her back left hand. She is accompanied by two female attendants, each of them standing on either side with a *vīṇā* in her hands. Two devotees, one a male and the other a female, seated on the pedestal and facing towards the goddess, are shown worshipping her from two sides with folded hands. A miniature swan, the vehicle of the goddess, is carved on the pedestal within a circle just below the lotus upon which the goddess stands. The presence of the Tīrthaṅkara on her crown identifies her with the Jaina goddess Sarasvatī. This image bears a remarkably serene expression. With all its sculptural exuberance it retains a feeling of delicacy and sensitiveness. It is a product of the well-blended sculptural orders of Rajasthan[49] and may be regarded as one of the best examples of medieval sculpture of the region.

In another sculpture of Sarasvatī, preserved in a temple at Mehsana in the Baroda district, the

goddess holds a rosary in the right upper hand and a book in the right lower, while in the left upper and lower hands she carries a *vīṇā* and a *kamaṇḍalu*. The deity rides on a swan carrying a string of pearls in its beak.

The Sarasvatī, found in the Caumukha temple at Ranakpur, shows the goddess with *vīṇā* and book in the two upper hands, and rosary and *kamaṇḍalu* in the two lower ones. Here also the deity rides on a swan. No Jaina literary evidence is forthcoming for this form. But it would be interesting to note that the Hindu tradition, as maintained by the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, describes the variety.[50]

In this connection reference may be made to a marble image of Sarasvatī, probably from Southwest Rajasthan, and at present preserved in the British Museum.[51] In this example the goddess is shown standing gracefully in *tribhaṅga* pose on an inscribed *padmapītha*. Her right hands are lost, while in her left hands she holds a rosary and a book. The elaborate *karaṇḍa-mukuṭa*, the charming jewellery and the diaphanous *sāḍī* secured with a girdle remind us of the famous Pallu image of Sarasvatī displayed in the National Museum, New Delhi. She is flanked by two cross-legged Dhyānī Tīrthaṅkaras on her either side. A miniature figure of Padmaprabha along with garland-bearing flying gandharva couples is shown above the image. Two standing figure of female attendants one each side, and two figures—to the

right a male and to the left a female—representing evidently the donor couple, are depicted near her feet. The image can be assigned to the days of the Paramāras, and more specifically to the 11th Century A. D.

Some images of Sarasvatī with important iconographic peculiarities have been discovered from different temples of Khajuraho. There is an image of the deity (Pl. XXXVIII) holding *vīṇā* by her first and fourth hands and a manuscript and a lotus in her second and third hands, respectiyely. The goddess sits in *lalitāsana* and wears ear-rings, pearl-necklace and bangles in her hands. This image may be assigned to the 10th century A. D. A damaged four-handed image of Sarasvatī of the 11th Century A. D., carrying *vīṇā* by her two front hands, while the remaining two hands being broken, has been also discovered from Khajuraho. The crown on the head, the pedestal on which the image is placed and the swan on which the goodess sits, are severely mutilated, She sits in *lalitāsana* and wears double necklace, armlets, bracelets and decorated girdles.

In the Pārśvanātha temple at Khajuraho, Sarasvatī has been represented seated and carrying *vīṇā* by her first and third hands, while she has a lotus in the fourth hand, the second hand being displayed in the *varada-mudrā*.[52] In the Viśvanātha temple she carries a lotus stalk and a manuscript in her second and third hands with *vīṇā* in her remaining hands.[53] Sometimes she has been depicted with her first hand in the *varada-mudrā*, the upper two

hands carrying lotus flowers, while the remaining hand has a manuscript.[54] Other four-handed images of Sarasvatī in the Vāmana temple, Khajuraho, represent her with the first hand in the *varada-mudrā,* and carrying a lotus, a *vīṇā*, a *ghaṭa* in the rest, or a manuscript and lotuses in the remaining three hands.[55]

A small marble image of Sarasvatī, worshipped in a temple at Acalagarh, Mt. Abu, shows a book and a lotus in the upper hands and *viṇā* in the remaining two hands. A palm-leaf manuscript painting, preserved in the Boston Museum, depicts the deity with the same attributes. A figure of Sarasvatī on a *paṭa,* published by Coomarawamy, shows her carrying a lotus and a book in the two upper hands, while the two lower hands display the *varada* and the *pravacana-mudrā.*

An image of Sarasvati from Patancheruvu[56] (Pl. XXXIX) is now preserved in the State Museum, Hyderabad. The figure of the goddess is endowed with a suppleness of form and flexibility of *bhaṅga.* She is decked with all sorts of ornaments like a high crown, ear-rings decorated with pearl, double necklace, armlets, bracelets and anklets. She wears diaphanous *sāḍī* with girdle and holds *pustaka* and rosary in her front two hands and a goad and a *khaḍga* in the upper two hands. Her vehicle *haṁsa* is by her left leg. Two persons with folded hands, one male and the other female, who seem to be the donor-couple, sit by her two sides. The minor figures in the complex, the *prabhā* and the Tīrthaṅ-

kara above, all left without polish, while the main image is highly polished. The inscription in the Devanāgarī bears a date corresponding to A. D. 1178.

An image of Sarasvatī, hailing from Vijaynagar (Pl. XL) and datable to the 14th century A. D., is preserved in the National Museum, New Delhi. Standing in *ābhaṅga* pose, the goddess holds rosary and a full-blossomed lotus in the back hands. The right front hand is in the *abhaya-mudrā*, while the left front hand is broken. She wears ornaments like ear-rings, pearl-necklace and armlets. Her lower garment is of fine texture and held up by a decorated girdle. She has full breasts, a broad hip and a narrow abdomen. On her high and decorated crown a Jina is represented. The goddess looks downwards showing an attitude of meditation.

A Hoyaśāla sculpture of Śāradā from the Ādinātha temple at Halebid holds the rosary, the goad, the *pāśa* and the book.[57]

Images of multi-armed Sarasvatī are also available in different temples. In the Parśvanātha temple, Khajuraho, there is a six-armed Sarasvatī seated in *lalitāsāna* and carrying *vīṇā* in one pair of hands and *varada*, blue lotus, book and *kamaṇḍalu* in the other two pairs. Two specimens of this variety are preserved in the Lunavashi temple, Mt. Abu. The first one has all the attributes mutilated excepting the lotus in the right upper hand which is partly preserved. The right upper hand of the image probaly showed *varada-mudrā* or the

rosary held in an open palm. The swan vehicle is clearly seen. The goddess has a female attendant on each side. The second one is carved on a pillar. The right and the left upper hands of the deity hold a lotus each and the two middle ones show the *jñāna-mudrā*. The right lower hand, showing the *abhaya-mudrā*, carries a rosary as well, while the left lower a *kamaṇḍalu*. The goddess has a swan as her vehicle.

On the west wall of the Taraṅga temple is an excellent sculpture of a goddess with all the cognizances of Sarasvatī. The goddess stands on a full-blown lotus with her right foot raised up in dancing attitude. She has eight arms, showing the book, the rosary and the *varada* in the right hands and the lotus, the noose and the book in the left. The remaining two attributes are mutilated. The familiar figure of the swan-vehicle confirms the identification of Sarasvatī.

A beautiful sculpture of sixteen-armed form of the goddess of learning is found on the ceiling of Vimala Saha's temple, Mt. Abu. Unfortunately, the image is mutilated. Attended by a dancing male figure on each side, the goddess sits in *bhadrāsana* showing lotus (*padma*), book (*pustaka*) and water-vessel (*kamaṇḍalu*) in the three left hands. All other hands, along with the *āyudhas* they held, are mutilated beyond recognition. However, the figure of the swan can be seen on the pedestal. A small seated figure of a Tīrthaṅkara is noticed above the crown.

From what has been noted above it may be remarked that the Jainas did not lag behind the Brahmanical Hindus in paying their respect to one of the most ancient and popular Indian goddesses. But what seems to be of special interest is the way in which they have fitted the goddess Sarasvatī, worshipped as speech incarnate, in the overall system of their pantheon. In the life of the Jainas the importance of the deity may be estimated from the fact that the texts written by the Jaina saints on Sarasvatī outnumber the Brahmanical and Buddhist texts devoted to her. Besides, the Jaina texts on the deity were composed through the centuries of the ancient and medieval ages indicating her uninterrupted popularity till the date. Sarasvatī appears to have entered into the Jaina pantneon almost directly from the later Vedic tradition and thus she is found to maintain almost all the iconographic features by which she is also known to her Hindu worshippers. No doubt, swan has been replaced by peacock by the Śvetāmbaras, but this seems to be a minor point, particularly in view of the modification of the deity accomplished in the hands of the Buddhists. But that is a different story to be treated in the next chapter.

VII

SARASVATĪ IN BUDDHIST PANTHEON

In foregoing chapters we have emphasised on the fact that Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, had a universal appeal on the followers of all the major religious systems in India. The Buddhists appear to have borrowed this Hindu goddess and modified her form in various ways. Her worship is widely prevalent among them owing to the belief that like Mañjuṣrī[1] and Prajñāpāramitā[2], she bestows knowledge, intelligence and memory. According to *śādhanas* dedicated to her, she is also believed to confer wisdom and learning on her worshippers.

I. *Textual Information* :

Sarasvatī has at least four different forms in Buddhist iconography, viz. Vajrasarasvatī, Vajravīṇā Sarasvatī, Vajraśāradā and Mahāsarasvatī. Besides these four varieties, there is also another form of the goddess, namely Āryasarasvatī. The iconographic features of these forms of Sarasvatī are clearly marked out in the *Sādhanamālā*, and an analysis of the information obtained from it will enable us to appraise their individual characteristics.

II. Four Forms of Sarasvatī :

(*a*) *Vajrasarasvatī* :

Vajrasarasvatī possesses three faces and six arms. She is red-complexioned, but her hairs are brown and raised upwards. She stands in the *pratyālīḍha* attitude on the red lotus. She is red in colour, but the colour of her right and left faces are blue and white, respectively. She carries in her three right hands the lotus (*padma*) on which is the *Prajñā-pāramitā* Book, the sword (*asi*) and the cutter (*kartarī*) and in the three left the *kapāla* of Brahmā (*Brāhmākapāla*), the jewel (*ratna*) and the discus (*cakra*). Instead of the book on lotus and *Brahmā-kapāla*, she may also hold the lotus and the *kapāla* only. Three *sādhanas* (No. 161, 163 & 167) of the *Sādhanamālā* are devoted to her.

(*b*) *Vajravīṇāsarasvatī* :

Vajravīṇāsarasvatī is white in complexion and shows a serene and benign appearance. She is bedecked with various ornaments and plays on a *viṇā* by her two hands. She may be represented as accompanied by four divinities like Prajñā, Medhā, Smṛti and Mati. She is believed to confer wisdom, memory and intelligence on her worshippers. A *sādhana* (No. 165) in the *Sādhana-mālā* is assigned to her worship.

(*c*) *Vajrasāradā* :

According to a *sādhana* (No. 166) in the

Sādhanamālā, Vajrasāradā rests upon a pure white lotus, while a crescent decorates her crown. She is three-eyed and two-armed. She carries a book in the left hand and her right hand holds a lotus. She may also be accompanied by the four attendants like Prajñā, Medhā, Smṛti and Mati. The *sādhana* being silent about the *āsana* (posture), she may have any one of the usual attitudes.

(d) Mahāsarasvatī :

Mahāsarasvatī is white-complexioned and two-armed, showing the *varada-mudrā* in the right hand and a white lotus in the left. The *dhyāna* (No. 162) describes her form in the following terms. The worshipper should conceive of the goddess Mahāsarasvatī as resplendent like the autumn moon, resting on the moon over the white lotus with its stalk. She has a smiling countenance, is extremely compassionate, and wears garments decorated with white sandal flowers. Her bosom is decorated with the pearl necklace and she is decked in various other ornaments. She appears to be a maiden of twelve years, and her bosom is uneven with half-developed breasts like flower-buds. She illumines the three worlds with the immeasurable light that radiates from her body.

The distinctive features of the goddess Mahāsarasvatī may be marked as showing the *varada-mudrā* in the right hand and the lotus in the left, and as being always surrounded by four deities identical in form with herself. Prajnā is in front of her,

Medhā to her right, Smṛti to her left and Mati in the west. These four divinities may also accompany other varieties of Sarasvatī. As the *Sādhana* is silent about her particular *āsana*, she may be represented in any attitude, sitting or standing.[3]

Ārya Sarasvatī :

Besides the above varieties, there is also Ārya-Sarasvatī which seems to be the common name of Sarasvatī of the Vajrayānists. She appears to be a maiden of sixteen and is in the prime of youth. She is white complexioned and wears white clothes. She carries in the left hand the stalk of a lotus on which rests the *Prajñāpāramitā* book. As the *Sādhanas* (Nos. 164 & 168) are silent about the symbol carried in the right hand, this hand may or may not remain empty. The *āsana* is not mentioned.

In this connection we may further note that under Vajrayāna influence Sarasvatī was incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon and naturally became the *śakti* of Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, the Buddhist god of Transcendental Wisdom. With the association of wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), she also became a companion of Avalokiteśvara. An example of sculptural representation of such association may be seen at Ellora.[4]

Mahāmāyūrī, Vāgiśvarī and Ārya Jāṅgulī :

In the Buddhist iconography, the images of

Mahamayūrī, Vāgīśvarī and Ārya Jāṅgulī are also sometimes associated with Sarasvatī in consideration of their special symbols, qualities and attributes. The *Sādhana*[5] of Mahāmāyūrī describes her two forms. In one form she has a green complexion, six arms, and three faces, each endowed with three eyes. Her right and left faces are of blue and white complexion, respectively. She holds in her three right hands the peacook's feather, the arrow and the *varada-mudrā*, and in the three left hands the jewel, the bow and the water-vessel on the lap. In another form she possesses one face, two arms holding peacock's feather in the right and displaying *varada-mudrā* in the left. She sits on a peacock. In popular mind peacock (*mayūra*) is closely related with Sarasvatī. It is, therefore, natural that Māhāmāyūrī may sometime be confused with her. It is for this reason that a few sculpture of Mahāmāyūrī in the caves of Ellora were previously identified as Sarasvatī. The confusion arose because of the presence of a peacock (*mayūra*) as her *vāhana* and the peacock-feather (*mayūra-piccha*) in her hands. But none of the Buddhist *Sādhanas* devoted to Sarasvatī associates her with *mayūra* or *mayūrapiccha* and as such Mahāmāyūrī has no tradional association with Sarasvatī.

The description of Vāgīśvarī, another variety of Buddhist Sarasvatī, does not find mention in any known text of Buddhist iconography. On the evidence of an inscribed image from Bodhgaya of the regnal year one of Gopāla II, we may identify

the images of Vāgīśvarī to be definitely of Buddhist association. Ārya Jāṅgulī, on her part, is white in complexion, four-armed, one-faced, and wears a *jaṭāmukuṭa* and a white scarf. She is decked in white ornaments of gems and white serpents and rests on an animal. She plays on the *viṇā* with two principal hands, carries white snake in the second left, exhibits the *abhay-* or *varada-mudrā* with the second right, and is radiant like the moon. Her white dress and appearance, the *viṇā* and the *abhay-* or *varada-mudrā* hand closely associate her with Sarasvatī. Both these deities, Vāgīśvarī and Ārya Jāṅgulī, have been treated, therefore, in the course of discussion on actual images having bearing on the Buddhist version of Sarasvatī.

III. *Actual Images* :

The actual images of Sarasvatī of the Buddhist version are very few in number. Perhaps the earliest representation of the goddess with Buddhist association is the one discovered from Ghaṇṭasāla, a Buddhist site of the Andhra State. The image (Pl. II) has been treated by us along with the images of Sarasvatī discovered from Bharhut (Pl. I) and Kaṅkālitilā, Mathura (Pl. III). Standing in *samabhaṅga* pose, the Ghaṇṭasāla Sarasvatī holds a lotus bud and a noose in her two upper hands ; the right lower hand is on the head of a swan, her vehicle, while the left lower hand is hanging. She

wears an ear-ring, a necklace, a *karaṇḍa-mukuṭa* on her head and a diaphanous *śāḍī* tied to her girdle. The image is assignable to the 2nd Century B. C.. Although the image comes from a Buddhist site, from her iconographical features she appears to be Sarasvatī of the Brahmanical tradition. It is apparent from the literary as well as archaeological evidence, or the rather lack of evidence, that Sarasvatī made her advent in the pantheon of the Buddhists in a late date, when Mahāyāna Buddhism came under domination by the followers of Tantric systems. Thus we meet Buddhist Sarasvatī only from the early medieval age.

A stone image of Sarasvatī (Pl. XLI) of the 9th Century A. D., preserved at the site museum of Nalanda, is possibly the earlist Buddhist version of the deity. The goddess with two legs crossed sits on a lotus supported on a *ghaṭa*. Her right hand is in the *varada-mudrā*, while the left one has been broken away. The. hair is in the form of a neat chignon clasped by a pearl tiara and with a crescent moon on right side. She wears tasteful ornaments principally made of pearls. Her face bears a calm and serene expression. Four male companions, two on each side, sit on lotuses. Three of them bear a manuscript in the left hand, while the right hands are either broken away or with indistinct emblems. The hands of the figure at the left upper are, however, missing.

The identification of the goddess presents certain problems. Previously she has been identified as

Koṭiśrī, a name of Durgā, but there is hardly any justification for such identification, except for the crescent moon on the crest. Her identification with Vajrasāradā, hesitatingly proposed by B. Bhattacharyya, is also to be considered as more or less tentative. According to the *Sādhana* (No. 162), a goddess holding *varada-mudrā* in the right hand, and a white lily by stalk in the left, and accompanied by four goddesses like Prajñā, Medhā, Smṛti and Mati is to be identified as Mahāsarasvatī. The *Sādhana* further mentions that the goddess is to be adorned with a pearl necklace (*muktāhāropaśobhitā*) and this is seen to be the most distinctive adornmnet of the goddess in the present image.[69] Though the attribute of the left hand, which is broken in the case of Nalanda image, is not clear and her accompanying deities are male, in consideration of other characteristics we may propose to identify the image as of Mahāsarasvatī.

A statuette, discovered from Sarnath and stylistically dated in the 6th Century A. D., is now preserved in the Sarnath Site Museum (Pl. XLII). It is made of Chunar sandstone and undoubtedly represents the goddess of learning and music. Sitting in *lalitāsana*, she plays on a *viṇā* by her two hands. Above her head is a foliage of a tree and to her proper right is shown a jar upside down. This Sarasvatī shows no iconographical difference from the usual Brahmanical representations of the deity, but as the image comes from a renowned Buddhist site, and bears one of the most characteristic

attributes of her, viz. *vīṇā*, she may be recognised as a Buddhist version of Sarasvatī. But there is equal possibility that it is a Brahmanical image which had somehow entered into a Buddhist monastery.

There is an image of Sarsvatī, belonging to the Pāla period, in the Nahar collection, Calcutta. The goddess sits in *padmāsana* on a full-bloomed lotus seat and plays on a *vīṇā* by her two hands. The hair is arranged in a neat chignon with a tiara. She wears ear-rings, necklace, armlets and bracelets. She has a calm and serene expression. The presence of a *stūpa* by the upper right side of an otherwise plain stela identifies the goddess with Sarasvatī of the Buddhist association.

An unidentified image, belonging to the 11th Century A. D., is in the possession of the Balurghat College Museum, Balurghat, West Bengal. The goddess holds attributes in her four hands in the following manner : right upper—rosary (*akṣamālā*), right lower—*varada-mudrā*, left upper—*pustaka*, and left lower—*abhaya* pose. She sits in *padmāsana* on a double-petalled lotus seat. She is richly adorned with a decorated crown, ear-rings, double pearl necklace, armlets, bracelets, waist-band and anklets. Around the stela there are images of Gaṇeśa, *dhyānī* Buddha Amitābha, Kapila, etc. The Nāga couple with folded hands are found seated on the decorated pedestal. This is possibly an image of Sarasvatī of the Buddhist version. Peculiarity of the deity may be noted in her *abhaya* pose shown by the left hand

instead of right. But from the presence of *pustaka* and rosary she seems to be a rare variety of Sarasvatī. It is, threfore, difficult to identify her name for the absence of any *Sādhana* corroborating her characteristics. The Amitābha on the stela and the Nāga couple on the pedestal lead us to believe that the image represents a Tantric Buddhist deity.

Images of Sarasvatī having lion as the vehicle of the goddess have been discovered from different places of India. The images of this variety are known as Vāgīśvarī or the *śakti* of Mañjuśrī and undoubtedly belong to the Buddhist pantheon. A headless image of Vāgīśvarī, seated on the back of lion and playing on a *vīṇā* by her two hands, has been discovered from Gāndhara[8] and is at present preserved in the Lahore Museum.

An interesting image of Vāgīśvarī has been discovered from Sobhanath hill[9], situated at a distance of about fifteen miles from Bodhgaya. The goddess sits in *lalitāsana* on a full-bloomed lotus having her left leg on another lotus placed on the back of the lion. She plays on a *vīṇā* by her two front hands and holds a rosary and a book by her remaining two hands. She is adorned with ornaments of different varieties. A male figure with folded hands, possibly the worshipper, kneels at the left corner of the pedestal. The inscription at the right corner of the pedestal describes the image as Vāgīśvarī.

Another image of Vāgīśvarī from Nalanda, carved in the first year of Gopal II, had been

discovered by Cunningham and is now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta.[10] The goddess (Pl. XLIII), sits in *lalitāsana* on a lotus placed on the lion's back. She holds a mace (*gadā*) and an axe (*paraśu*) by her two upper hands and draws out by her two lower hands the tongues of two persons, who have possibly committed sins by uttering false words, with a pair of tongs. She wears a crown on her head and is decked with ornaments like ear-rings, double necklace, armlets, bracelets, decorated girdles and anklets. Flying *Vidyādhāras* are seen by her two sides. The semi-circular stela is bordered with lotus motifs.

A stone image of Vāgīśvarī (Pl. XLIV), of the 10th century A. D., is preserved at the Museum of Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi, Bangladesh. The goddess sits on *lalitāsana* with right leg supported on a lotus placed on the hind part of a lion shown on the pedestal. It is a four-handed image having *varada-mudrā* and sword (missing) in the right hands. With her left lower hand she is drawing out by a pair of tongs the tongue of a figure shown on the pedestal, and by the upper left she holds a mirror (*darpaṇa*). It is notable that *darpaṇa* has been mentioned as one of the attributes of Sarasvatī in the Brahmanical texts. The head of the goddess is surrounded by a halo with lotus-petal borders. She is found to be flanked by two female figures, each of their right hand bearing a flywhisk and left hanging down.

Another six-handed abraded image of Vāgīśvarī

(Pl. XLV), belonging to the 10th Century A. D., has been recently discovered from Nalanda and yet to be published. The goddess sits in *lalitāsana* on a double-petalled lotus throne, her right leg being on a full-bloomed lotus. One of her right hands is in the *varada-mudrā*, while she holds a sword and a rosary (*akṣamālā*) by her other two right hands. The left front and the middle hands hold a water-vessel signifying knowledge and mace (*gadā*), respectively. The back left is in the *siṁha-karṇa-mudrā* and holds a looking glass (*darpaṇa*). The goddess is bejewelled with ear-rings, a long necklace with a pendant, armlets, bracelets, decorated girdles and anklets. The face of the goddess is severely damaged but her hair is arranged in a big chignon. There is a three-tiered *chatrāvalī*, a Buddhist sign, over the head of the goddess. The stela is decorated with beaded borders, having a diversion in the lotus motif carved on each side of the border. The lion, her vehicle, sits in the left side of the pedestal.

It is to be noted that no *dhyāna* of Vāgīśvarī of the above description finds mention in any known Buddhist iconographical text. Our identification of the goddess as Vāgīśvarī is based on the evidence of the inscribed image from Bodhgaya of the 1st regnal year of Gopala II. From the Buddhist creed inscribed on the image, she is known to be a Buddhist goddess.

In Buddhist iconography Sarasvatī is sometimes identified with Ārya Jāṅgulī, meaning literally, the

goddess of the wilds. She plays on the lyre (*viṇā*) by her normal hands, bestows boon by the extra right hand and holds a white snake in the left. Her colour is milk white and thus known to be a form of white Tārā, while her association with snakes pushes the tradition further back. Though it is difficult to find out the exact period when the conception of Jāṅgulī found place in a system of religious worship, it can be said that she appears to have been a divinity of the aboriginal tribes of India, and was given a shape and admitted into the Buddhist pantheon in a fairly early period. In a passage of the *Atharvaveda*[11] Sarasvatī herself is spoken of as a destroyer of poison, and she is found to be invoked in that capacity. In this aspect Sarasvatī was a girl of the Savaras, and thus possibly could not develop in the Brahmanical pantheon. But the Mahāyāna Buddhists in their liberal approach to the aborigins accepted this snake-goddess and called her Jāṅgulī, as if not to forget her connection with the Savaras. The Brahmanical anti-venom Sarasvatī, the source of Jāṅgulī, seems to have retreated to the background for centuries. However, an image of Manasā, now in the Indian Museum (Fig. XLVI) and datable in the 10th Century A. D., throws fresh light on the problem. The goddess is shown in meditative pose, sitting as crossed legged. A hood of seven serpents is over her head. The upper left hand holds book and the lower left a pitcher of nectar. The right upper carries a rosary, while the right lower is in the *varada-mudrā*.

The attributes of the goddess are those ot Sarasvatī, if the serpent over the head of the goddess and the pitcher below her seat emitting two serpents were absent. The carved representations on the stela of a Liṅga and a Ganeśa on the two sides of the deity clearly associate the Manasā with the Brahmanical system. But it is further interesting to note that an image of a two-handed female deity, playing on a *vīṇā* and having behind a seven hooded snake, has been discovered from Khiching in Orissa, and is datable in the 9th-10th Century A. D. Possibly a conceptual trend, representing Sarasvatī associated with snake, as old as the *Atharvaveda*, continued all through, though somewhat in the background, and she was usually worshipped by the jungle people. In course of time, she came to be known as Jāṅgulī among the Buddhists and Manasā among the Hindus.

IV. Images Outside India :

Hinduism and Buddhism flourished side by side in India from a very early date and some of the Brahmanical gods and goddesses became so popular with the Buddhists that they could not help incorporating them in their own religion. As a result, along with the important personalities and philosophical concepts of their own faith, the Buddhists deified a number of Hindu gods and goddesses like Ganeśa, Sarasvatī and so on. Subsequently, when the Tantric mode of Buddhism

came into vogue, they busied themselves in producing images of such gods and goddesses to meet the popular demand. In this period of Tantric domination innumerable Buddhist texts and icons were transmitted through the Himalayan passes to Nepal, Tibet, China and possibly thence to Japan. A large section of population in those countries, susceptible to magic and sorcery, became readily converted to the faith of the master as followed by the then Tantric Buddhists.

(i) *Nepal* : Buddhism was preached in Nepal by Buddha himself. It is, therefore, natural that the introduction of image worship in Buddhism would influence the Nepalese in the same way as it had influenced the Indian Buddhists. There is reason to believe that Sarasvatī was worshipped in Nepal along with other gods and goddesses, but her images are very scarce in that country. However, in the Boston Museum there is a charming bronze image of Sarasvatī ḥailing from Nepal. The four-handed goddess[12] sits in *lalitāsana* on a lotus seat holding a lotus (*padma*) and a manuscript (*pustaka*) in lower and upper left hands, respectively. The attribute in her upper right hand is unrecognisable, while her lower right hand is placed on the right thigh. The goddess is bejewelled with a crown, pearl necklace, armlets, bracelets and waist-band. It is, however, the baroque exuberance of the intricate aureole that dominates the entire composition of the image. The goddess appears interesting because of her grotesque form, once again a contri-

bution of Tantric imagery. A beautiful image of Sarasvatī of the 16th Century A. D. has been preserved in the Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim (Pl. XLVII). The goddess sits in *vīrāsana* on a double-petalled lotus seat supported by a pair of swans. In her left hand she holds a budding lotus, while her right hand is in the *varada-mudrā*. She wears a pearl necklace, *kuṇḍalas* and a pair of bangles. The hair is in the form of a neat chignon clasped by a pearl tiara. A blooming lotus decorates the top of the chignon. A scarf covers a part of her upper body. The stylised folds of the scarf and the lower garment augment the beauty of the image. She expresses deep concentration of mind in her eyes, while her forehead is marked with a circular *tilaka*. A female figure stands on each side of her with a *sudhābhāṇḍa*. Musical instruments are played by female figures on her sides while the other two offer oblations to her. The circular aureole behind is edged with fire motifs and delicate in execution, and the pedestal is unique in design having animal motifs.

(ii) *Tibet* : In Tibet Sarasvatī images of different varieties, *mudrās* and attributes have come to light. A. K. Gordon[13] refers to a rare specimen of Sarasvatī image discovered from the plateau. The goddess sits in *ardhaparyaṅka* pose on a double-petalled lotus seat and plays on a lyre (*vīṇā*) by her two hands. Inside the decorated stela there are seven figures, two of which in the left side are beyond recognition. Another image of Sarasvatī,

holding and playing on a *vīṇā* of the same type, sits in the *pratyalīḍha* pose. She wears a beaded *ratna-mukuṭa*, ear-rings, double necklace, armlets and bracelets. The image seems to be an example of serene and tranquil calm and represents the typical art of Tibet. Other images of Sarasvatī holding and playing on *vīṇā* by her two hands, but seated in *ardhaparyaṅkāsana*, have also been found in Tibet (Pl. XLVIII). A good number of Sarasvatī images, sitting or standing, but holding lotus (*padma*) in the left hand and showing *varada-mudrā* in the right, are also found in the country. Besides, there are specimens of the two- or four-handed seated images of Sarasvatī holding *vajra* instead of *vīṇā* and *padma* and *pustaka* at shoulder level.

An uncommon specimen of a red-coloured Sarasvatī image (Pl. XLIX) with three heads and six arms appears to be of special interest. W. E. Clark has identified it as the Rakta-Sarasvatī.[14] The goddess sits in *pratyālīḍha* pose, holding *pustaka*, *khaḍga* and *karttṛka* in the three right hands, while the three left hands carries *Brahmākapāla*, *maṇi* and *cakra*. The *Sādhana* on the Rakta-Sarasvatī, as discused above, fully agrees with this Tibetan example and thus corroborates the view of Clark. Her ornaments include ear-rings, double necklace, armlets, bracelets, waist-band and anklets. A specimen of Saḍbhujā-Sarasvatī (Pl. L), having one face and six arms, but possessing the same attributes of Rakta-Sarasvatī has also been found in Tibet. The existence of different types of

Sarasvatī images in Tibet testifies to the fact that the goddess of wisdom and culture was widely worshipped in the country of the Himalayan plateau.

(iii) *Japan*: Alice Getty maintains the view that the goddess Benten is looked upon as a manifestation of Sarasvatī in Japan. Her full name is Dai-ben-zai-ten or Great Divinity of Reasoning Faculty. She is a manifestation of white snake, and thus possibly an aspect of Jāṅgulī Tārā. She is believed to be capable of conferring happiness, riches, long life, fame and reasoning powers. In regard to the goddess Benten there is an interesting legend in Japan. It is said that a monstrous dragon devoured all children of the neighbourhood of the cave where he dwelt. Then there a violent earthquake took place, and the goddess Benten appeared in the cloud. From the waters suddenly emerged the island Enoshima and the goddess Benten, descending the island, married the dragon and put an end to the ravages. The goddess Benten generally sits or stands on a dragon or a huge snake holding in her two arms a *biwa* or Japanese lyre.

Benten is closely connected with snakes and dragons and her shrines are always in caverns, on islands or near the sea. Although there are many legends of Benten connecting her with snakes, there is nothing to explain the role of the snake in its association with Benten. It is not clear whether the snake and Benten are the same or the former is a vehicle of the latter. The goddess Benten has also a

Tantric representation in Japan. In that capacity she possesses eight arms holding sword, spear, axe, box, arrow, lasso, thunderbolt and a wheel of law. Benten is sometimes also believed to be a sister of Viṣṇu or a feminine manifestation of Vairocana ; but in her form with a lyre she is unquestionably a manifestation of Sarasvatī. If we take dragon as an alternative to snake, there would be no difficulty in a broad manner to connect Benten with Jāṅgulī of the Indian Buddhist pantheon.

(iv) *Java*: The Tantric Buddhism, which flourished in Eastern India, also travelled to south-east Asia by the sea route. In fact, there is unquestionable archaeological evidence to show a regular connection between the Pālas of Eastern India and the Śailendras of Java and Sumatra. The Tantric Buddhist images, cast in bronze following the Nalanda examples, have been discovered from Java. It is natural, therefore, that Sarasvatī in her Buddhist version was also introduced to this island country. But in reality the image of Sarasvatī is very scarce in Java. Professor Krom describes her as riding on a peacock. She is two- or four-armed, but her attributes, if present, are irrecognisable. There are also figures of a goddess with a lute, which may be identified as the representation of Sarasvatī. An image of this type (Pl. LI) has been discovered from Java. The goddess sits on a full-bloomed lotus seat, holding and playing on a *vīṇā* by her two hands. She, however, shows no vehicle-like swan or peacock. She wears a crown,

necklace, ear-rings, armlets and bracelets. She seems to be in deep meditation and tranquil calm. Another image of a goddess playing on a seven stringed *vīṇā* by her two hands, has also heen found in Java. Here the goddess wears a *karaṇḍa-mukuṭa* over her head along with her usual ornaments. The peculiarity of the image is that her *vīṇā* is not of usual type, but a boat-shaped one. It is interesting to note that this type of lyre found to have been depicted in the ancient and early medieval relief sculptures of Bengal and Bihar. In the background of close relationship that existed between Java and Eastern India it would be logical to conclude that the Jayanese Sarasvatī is a prototype of the Nalanda Sarasvatī. In this connection it may be noted that the Leiden Museum of Java contains two bronze Sarasvatī having *vīṇā* in her two hands as an attribute.

Notes and References

1. Mañjuśrī :—Mañjuśrī is the Buddhist god of Transcendental Wisdom. He is endowed with six arms ; in the three right hands he holds the sword, *varada-mudrā* and the arrow, and in the three left hands shows the *Prajñāpāramitā* book, the blue lotus and the bow. Mañjuśrī is important in the Buddhist pantheon as the God of Learning. He destroys ignorance with the sword and preaches knowledge with the book of transcendental wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*). The Buddhists believe that the worship of Mañjuśrī can confer upon them wisdom, retentive memory, intelligence and eloquence and enables them to master over sacred scriptures.

2. Prajñāpāramitā :—Prajñāpāramitā is the embodiment of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and as such she is considered to be the goddess of transcendental knowledge which the *Sūtra* stands for. As many as nine *Sādhanas* (Nos. 151-159) in the *Sādhanamālā* bear description of the goddess, and a hymn is (No. 160) devoted to her praise. These descriptions classify the representations of the goddess into two principal categories—white and yellow. She may be two-handed or four-handed. She is described to be seated in *vajraparyaṅka* having red lotus, *Prajñāpāramitā-pustaka*, *vyākhyāna* or *dharmacakra* and *abhaya-mudrā* in her hands. She bestows knowledge, wisdom and eloquence.

3. A reference may be made to the eight-handed Mahāsarasvatī of the Hindus. She holds conch (*saṅkha*) plough (*hala*) trident (*śūla*) and bell (*ghaṇṭā*) in her four right hands, and mace (*muṣala*), discus (*cakra*), bow (*dhanu*) and arrow (*sāyaka*) in the four left hands. She sits on a lotus. Although she bestows knowledge, the Hindu Mahāsarasvatī is known to be a variant of the goddess Durgā or Bhadrakālī (cf. *Mahābhārata*, *Bhiṣma parvan*, *Adhyāya* XXIII.)

4. Gupta R. S., *The Iconography of the Buddhist Sculptures (Caves) of Ellora*, p. 110, Pl. 16b.
5. *Nispannayogāvalī*, p. 42.
6. Saraswati, S. K., *Tantrayāna Art*, Pl. 182, p. 67.
7. *ARASI*, 1904-5, p. 86.
8. Vidyabhusan, A. C., *Sarasvatī*, Pl. XV (b), p. 82.
9. *Ibid.* Pt. XV (a), p. 82.
10. Pratapaditya Pal identifies this image as Pārvatī. This identification is obviously wrong. From the inscription on the pedestal of the image it is definitely known to be an image of Vāgīśvarī, a Buddhist goddess. See Pal, P., *The Arts of Nepal*, Fig. 221.
11. *Atharvaveda Saṁhitā*, Tr. by Whitney and Lanman, vol. I, p. 354.
12. Pal. P., *Arts of Nepal*, Fig. 240.
13. Gordon, A. K., *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*, p. 73.
14. Clark, W. E., *Two Lamaistic Pantheons*, p. 203, Pl. 6A51.

VIII
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The information collected from the sources like the *Vedas*, the *Brāhmṇas*, the *Mahābhārata*, and the myths and legends of the *Purāṇas* and the *Upa-purāṇas*, throws interesting light on the transformation of the Vedic river Sarasvatī into a goddess of learning, speech and music. The metamorphosis of Sarasvatī from a river to a female deity took place through a process which is far from straight. It has started from a time when the banks of Sarasvatī had been esteemed as the most sacred spot for sacrifice and all prominent sages had their hermitages on them. As a result, the river Sarasvatī became sanctified and the religious rites like the *śrādhas* were performed on her banks which were regarded as the most auspicious for sacrificial purposes. It is on her banks that *Agni-Vaiśvānara* issued forth from the mouth of *Videgha Mādhava* and travelled to the east carrying the Aryan religion of sacrifice to that region. It is she who conserved the *Vedas* by feeding the sage Sārasvata on her fishes when during the twelve years' drought other Brāhmaṇas had left the region. This Vedic tradition of Sarasvatī being the wife of Sārasvata was added to the feminine ending of ***nadī***. An earlier identification with Vāc (speech) helped

the process still further. In the *Vedas* and the *Brāhmaṇas*, Sarasvatī is also identified with speech of the middle region and also with the second form of the thunderbolt. In fact, it is she who created the thunderbolt for Indra out of her own foam in which a generous measure of melted butter formed an ingredient. In later lexicons all synonyms of Sarasvatī came to be equated with divine wisdom and the revealer of Vedic lores. Thus in the *Vedas* and the *Nirukta* it was securely established that Sarasvatī gave copious waters and imparted wisdom.

In the Ṛgvedic tradition Sarasvatī is found to be represented both as a river and a goddess. An intermediate identification with the learned female seer Vāc appears to have expedited the process of transformation from river to a deity. Thus the river Sarasvatī, so frequently mentioned in the *Vedas* and the *Brāhmaṇas*, recedes into the background and the aspect of the deity comes to the fore-front. Vāc-Sarasvatī and Sarasvatī-Vāc are the forms sometimes met with, and Sarasvatī is repeatedly credited, parallelly with Vāc, as having used her speech to help the gods in their attack upon the demons and to cure them when ill or exhausted. Once the relation between Sarasvatī and Vāc became firmly established the status of the former as a symbol of learning was definitely secured and she became the mother of the *Vedas* and the dispenser of all wisdom and clarity of speech. She then took an anthropomorphic shape to be adorned

as a deity. Thence she is noted to be proclaimed as the foremost of all mothers, the best of the rivers and the greatest of the goddesses.

In the Vedic tradition Sarasvatī is primarily regarded as the *śakti* of Brahmā, the revealer of the *Vedas*, and the presiding deity of wisdom and learning. She still retains the swan and the lotus as her seats and carries the rosary and the books representing the *Vedas* in her hands. She is intimately connected with Brahmā in her depiction in literature, inscriptions and religious practices. She is very often described as having a short and strong temper and is devoid of the qualities of an ideal wife. When Brahmā married the youthful Gāyatrī, she cursed him to the effect that Brahmā would be worshipped only one day in the year. This myth seems to have reconciled the reality of the gradual extinction of Brahmā's temples and worship. It possibly also explains why Sarasvatī assumed an independent status. Her devotees preferred to disassociate her from a Vedic god waning in prestige, because they knew that in a country of culture like India Sarasvatī as a symbol of learning would always be popular. But once being divested of matrimonial encumbrances with Brahmā, the Puranic mind began to search a new partner for her.

When Viṣṇu rose to eminence a connection of Sarasvatī with him was established. In the *Prapañcasāra Tantra* Vāc and Sarasvatī became the *Vaiṣṇava śaktis* of consonants and vowels, resepectively.

A close relationship with Lakṣmī, the goddess of prosperity and the wife of Viṣṇu, from very early times helped the Vaisnavite transformation of her. Not only Sarasvatī became endowed with prosperity, but she was very often invoked together with Lakṣmī. She is one of the deities who despoiled Śrī of her riches, and also became the co-wife of Viṣṇu along with Lakṣmī. The natural antagonism of co-wives, found in them, possibly establishes a hate and love relationship between prosperity and learning all over the world.

To what length the strained relationship between the two co-wives of Viṣṇu might go, is described with great details in the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa* where an amusing story of domestic unquietness is told. Viṣṇu had always been partial towards Lakṣmī and this was too much for the other two wives, Sarasvatī and Gaṅgā. As soon as Viṣṇu was out one day, a quarrel broke out and by mutual curses all the three were converted into streams like Sarasvatī, Gaṅgā and Padmā. Here we have the counter process of the Vedic belief, for in the *Vedas* we find a river transformed into a goddess, while in a late Puranic tradition the goddess is transformed into a river. The same reversal in concept may also be observed in the long legend of the *Padma Purāṇa* (*Sṛṣṭikhaṇḍa*) wherein it is stated that Sarasvatī, the daughter of Brahmā was approached by Viṣṇu to carry fire (*anala*) from Puṣkara and to drop it into the sea (*lavaṇasāgara*).

Both Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī are symbolically worshipped on corn and books, respectively. In some parts of Bengal their images are not usually immersed lest prosperity or learning, as the case may be, should depart. The four arms with which Sarasvatī is sometimes invested, the lotus and discus that sometimes appear in her hands, her worship on the *Śrī-pañcamī* day, which is equally sacred to Lakṣmī, in her descriptions as the *śakti* of the *Saṁkarṣaṇa Vyūha* of Nārāyaṇa—all ally her with Viṣṇu. In order to explain why she was at all related to Brahmā, the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* mentions the quarrel of the co-wives of Viṣṇu who finally sent Sarasvatī away to Brahmā and Gaṅgā to Śiva, bestowing on the former the uncomplimentary epithets *Vāgdustā* and *Kalahapriyā* and calling Lakṣmī *suśīlā*.. This story of the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, narrating the feud among Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Gaṅgā, apparently indicative of a late date, when an attempt was made under the influence of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa cult to transform Sarasvatī and Gaṅgā into their original river form.

The transformation of the goddess into the *śakti* of Śiva, whose spirit of revelation she ultimately became, may be traced in the Saiva Āgamas. In Kashmir Śāradā, who is identical with Sarasvatī, claimed fervent devotion. Durgā as a synonym of Vāc appears in the *Bṛhat Devatā* and the only goddess having resemblance with Sarasvatī to be found in the *Bṛhat Saṁhitā* is Ekānaṁsā with whom Durgā is identified. In the *Śāradātilakatantra*,

from which the present mode of worshipping Sarasvatī is derived, her Śaiva associations are clear. She is *Śāradā, Varadā, Parvata-śikhara-jātā*, snow-white, three-eyed and with the crescent moon on her forehead. Later compositions call her *Gourī, Śivakāntā, Śaṅkarārdhāṅginī, Bhadrakālī, Maheśvarī* and *Sarvāṇī*. She is seated on a lion, clothed in tiger-skin and decorated with serpents and the trident (*triśūla*). The blue Sarasvatī is also a Saiva innovation, based probably on a *Brāhmaṇa* tradition. It was only by helping the gods that Sarasvatī got a blue lotus as a reward. If Brahmā's wisdom *(jñāna)* and Viṣṇu's propsperity (*aiśvarya*) could be associated with Sarasvatī, it is but natural that Śiva's dispassion (*vairāgya*) should also be related to her in a land where the ideal of life is a harmonization of these three virtues. In spite of many dark things ascribed to Sarasvatī in the *Purāṇas*, she retains all through the whiteness of purity or the blueness of immensity and depth, and represents spiritual qualities of the mind, such as, *prajñā, medhā, smṛti, mati*, etc,

Sarasvatī, whose first appearance is noted in the *Ṛgveda*, has grown in popularity through the ages. No doubt, her association with the presiding deities changed from time to time. In the Vedic tradition she is a consort of the leading Vedic deity Brahmā, and known also to be associated with Indra, Aśvins, Mitra, Varuṇa and others in her activities. But as time changed, and the cult of Viṣṇu emerged powerfully, Sarasvatī came to be associated with

him, notwithstanding the secured position of Lakşmī as his consort. In a still later period we find her as the consort of Śiva, and worshipped in Śivaite manner. But in spite of such a variegated relationship with the presiding deities of the different phases of her conceptual evolution what seems to be significant is her universal acceptance by the Indians as a goddess of purity, learning and fine arts. There is reason to believe that the followers of diflerent cult divinities, particularly of the Puranic tradition, adopted her in their myths being unable to ignore the popularity she enjoyed. This is because the tradition of Sarasvatī as a goddess of learning and purity persisted in the mind of the people since the days of the *Ṛgveda*, when she lived the dual-life of a river as also of a female divinity.

From the *Purāṇas*, the *Āgamas*, the *Śilpa* texts and the *Tantras*, it would be clear that in spite of some variations Sarasvatī retained several easily congnizant attributes and vehicles which help us identifying her without much doubt. She is white complexioned and usually wears white clothes and even among the ornaments her favourite one is made of white pearls. She sits or stands on white lotus and also generally holds the same flower in one of her hands. *Vīṇā*, i. e. lyre and *pustaka*, i. e. manuscript, are however, the most characteristic of her attributes, while rosary, water-vessel, pen, etc. are also popularaly known in the same category. *Haṁsa* or Swan, an association with

Brahmâ, the Vedic god, continues till to date as the usual vehicle of Sarasvatī. Peacock and lion are two variants that may also be met with beneath her in the different tradition.

The place of learning, fine arts and over all purity of mind in the life of the Indian people may be appreciated from the fact that, the concept of the goddess Sarasvatī made no less impact on the followers of two other major religious systems independent of the Brahmanical Puranic tradition. Though the Jainism and Buddhism originated with a note of protest against the domination of the Brahmanical vested interest over the religious life of the people in the closing days of the Vedic period, the followers of both these religions are found to take up in the course of time, many of the divinities worshipped by the Brahmanical Hindus. It is natural, therefore, that Sarasvatī with her symbolic import in relation to some universal qualities would be inducted into their pantheons. To meet the temperaments and tastes of the followers of Mahâvīra and Tathâgata the form and implication of the deity have heen modified in different aspects, but here, too, what is significant is her invariable association with the virtue, or *śīla*, as it may be called, of knowledge and purity. Besides, in some of the aspects of the Buddhist Sarasvatī, it is possible to trace some clear tribal traits associated in particular with the Sabaras. It appears extremely interesting when we note that a tradition of Sarasvatī relating her with snake cult

finds a clear cognizance in as late a period as the 12th Century A. D. in the forms of Manasā worshipped in Eastern India. The same can be said also in regard to Jāṅgulī, the Buddhist divinity, who shows snakes as her associates. Again, all these snake associations seem to have descended from a hoary past when the *Atharvaveda*, containing a tradition of Sarasvatī as a healer from the dying effect of the snake poison, was composed.

The growth of the Buddhist pantheon took place during that phase of the religion which may be termed as Mahāyāna-Tantrayāna. Development of the Mahāyāna-Tantrayāna cult began sometime about the third-fourth Century A. D., but its final form was given in Eastern India between the 8th and the 12th Century A. D. When the Mahāyāna-Tantrayāna aspect of Buddhism spread out in different northern and southeastern countries, we find that the concept of Sarasvatī in her Buddhist version follows the track. Thus, though in a much diluted form, the Sarasvatī concept is noted to be prevalent at least as a passing phenomenon in such distant countries as Nepal and Tibet on one hand and Java on the other. It seems that the reason behind this universal acceptance of the concept of Sarasvatī is nothing but the qualities and virtues, viz. knowledge, purity of mind, learning of fine arts, etc. which she symbolizes in her chaste and exquisite form.

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